

DC COMICS
VERTIGO
BOOK 3 OF 3

DESTINY

A CHRONICLE OF DEATHS FORETOLD

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+

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+

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LYVE: TO DYE AND:

DYE TO LYVE: ETERNALLY:

BOOK THREE: EYAM

DESTINY

A CHRONICLE of DEATHS / FORETOLD



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NOV. 1, 2009: FROM THE JOURNAL OF RUTH KNIGHT:

It seems impossible that Ryder made me the offer only yesterday.

It reminds me of how I felt a year after the plague began. As if a century had passed. Now I even feel nostalgia for the lost innocence of that time, when the horror was still new.

YOU'RE ASKING ME... IF I WILL **BARTER** FOR HER LIFE? IS THAT WHAT YOU'RE SAYING? THAT YOU **COULD** SAVE HER IF YOU WANTED TO?

Horror does not corrupt when it is new.

I THINK YOU ARE NOT WHAT YOU SEEM. I DON'T KNOW IF YOU'RE A LITTLE MORE THAN HUMAN, OR A LITTLE LESS, BUT I **DO** KNOW THAT YOU'VE BEEN LYING TO ME.

WHAT DO YOU THINK, RUTH?

YOU NEVER CARED WHETHER THE **OTHER** SURVIVORS BELIEVED YOUR STORIES. I WAS THE ONE YOU NEEDED TO CONVINCE.

WELL, RYDER, I'M CONVINCED. YOU CAN HAVE PALADIN. JUST MAKE THE CHILD WELL.

CAN YOU DO IT?



NO. I
CANNOT. I AM
NO HEALER.



AND EVEN IF I
COULD SAVE THIS ONE
LIFE,,, IT WOULD BE
A KIND OF **CRUELTY**,
GIVEN WHAT I AM.



BESIDES, HOW DO
YOU KNOW THAT THE GIRL
NEEDS SAVING? SICK AS
SHE IS, SHE MAY YET
SURVIVE, WHILE FIVE
OTHERS IN PERFECT
HEALTH BREATHE
THEIR LAST BEFORE
DAY BREAKS.



I CAN SHOW YOU
THE FUTURE, RUTH, IF
YOU CAN BEAR
KNOWING IT.

BUT I CAN'T
PROMISE TO CHANGE
WHAT IS **WRITTEN**.

NO. IF YOU
CAN'T HELP HER,
I'LL CLING TO
HOPE.

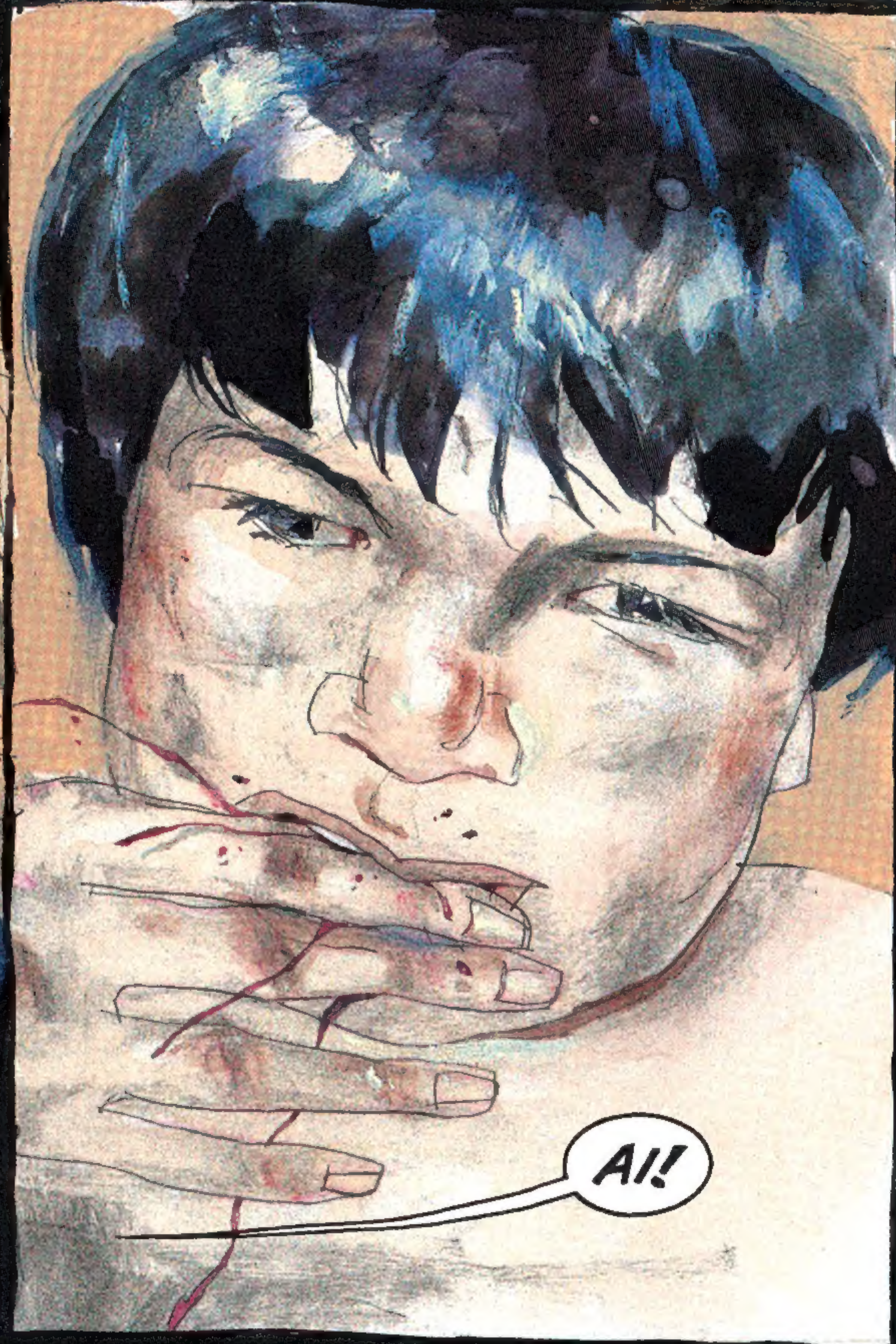
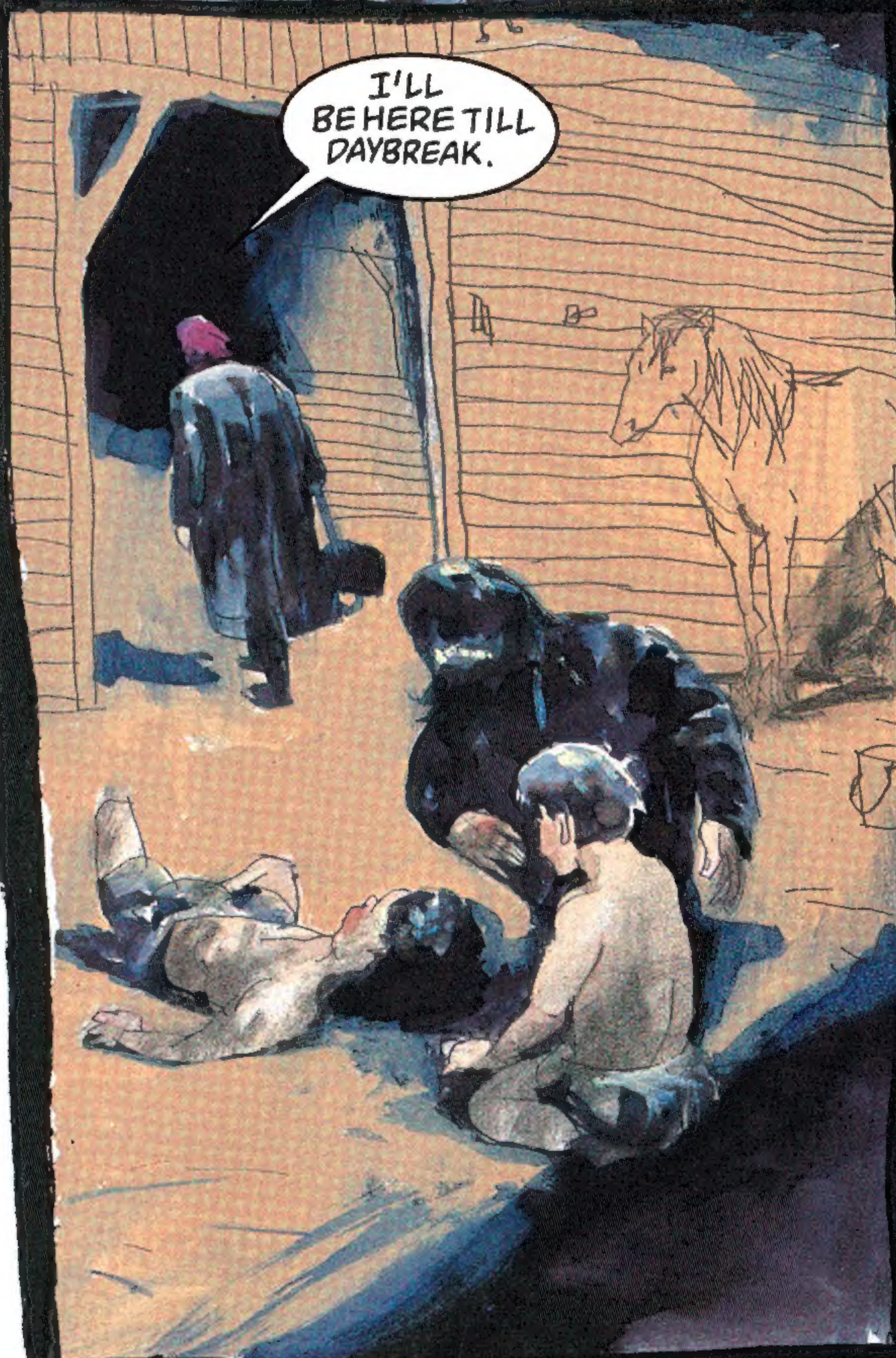


IF THAT'S
YOUR CHOICE,
RUTH, I'LL ABIDE
BY IT.

BUT IF
YOU CHANGE
YOUR MIND,,



I'LL
BE HERE TILL
DAYBREAK.



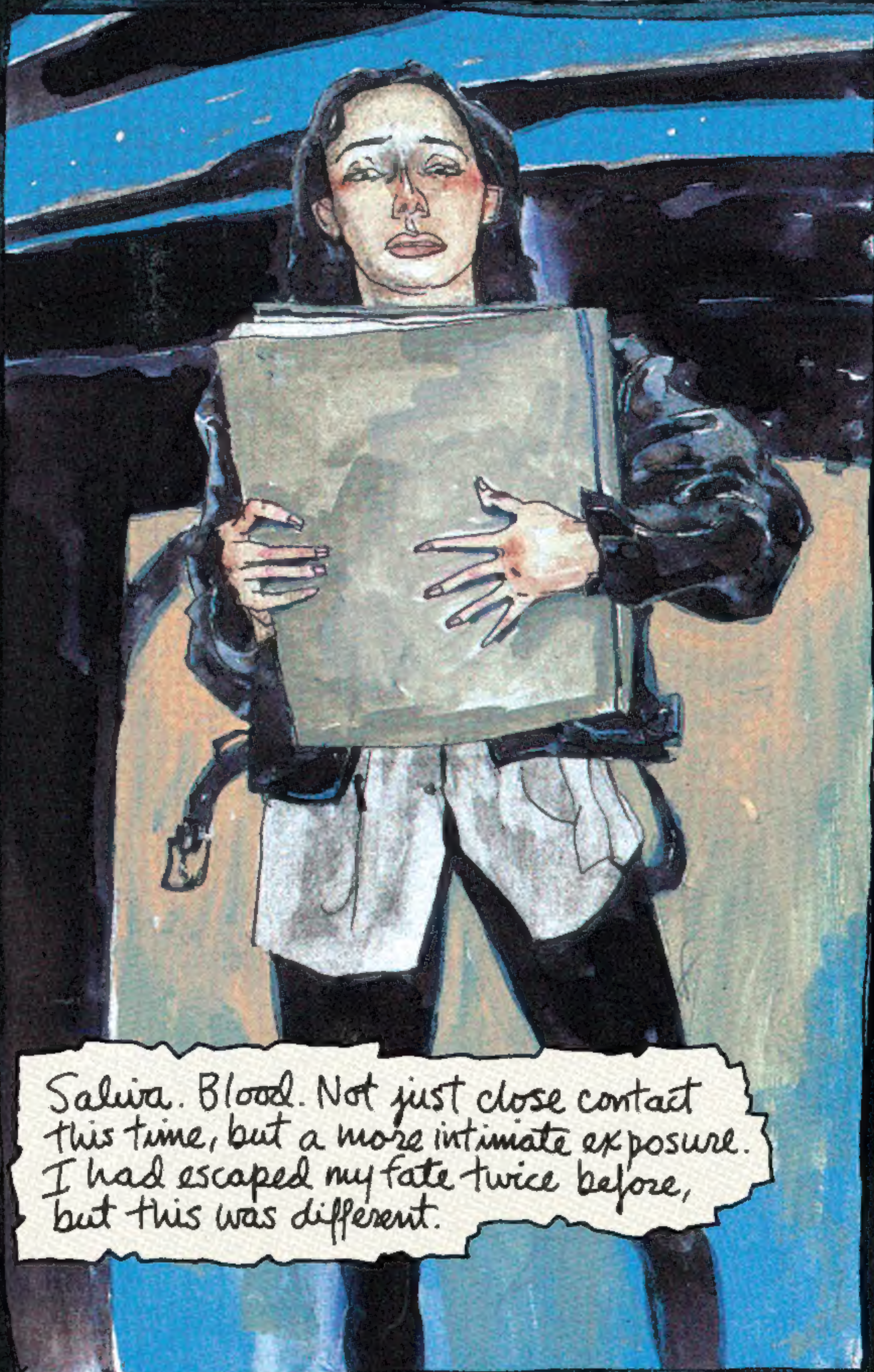
AI!

I could still see the marks where the boy had bitten me, livid red against my arm.

He might even have been the child who'd bitten me the years before when I offered him food, but this time he had broken the skin.

I wonder if I had begun to feel myself immune from the plague. Was that why I hadn't been afraid to touch the girl?

He had broken the skin.



Saliva. Blood. Not just close contact this time, but a more intimate exposure. I had escaped my fate twice before, but this was different.



I didn't think about what I was doing. I didn't contemplate the consequences.

I stole the knowledge that had been offered to me without once considering the price.



On a night when spirits are supposed to roam free,
I sat surrounded by the woolly musk of clean sheep,
and the sour, fleshy scent of milking cows. All
dead now, long dead.

I intended to discover if I would
soon share their fate.

But once in my hands, Ryder's book
fell open to a particularly well-thumbed
chapter, as if inviting me in, and
instead of reading my future, I lost
myself in the past.

THE BOOK OF DESTINY,
GRIMOIRE PUBLISHERS,
GREAT BRITAIN, 1899:

These days, Eyam is mostly
a mining town, and its men
cough bloody lung into their
evening meals.

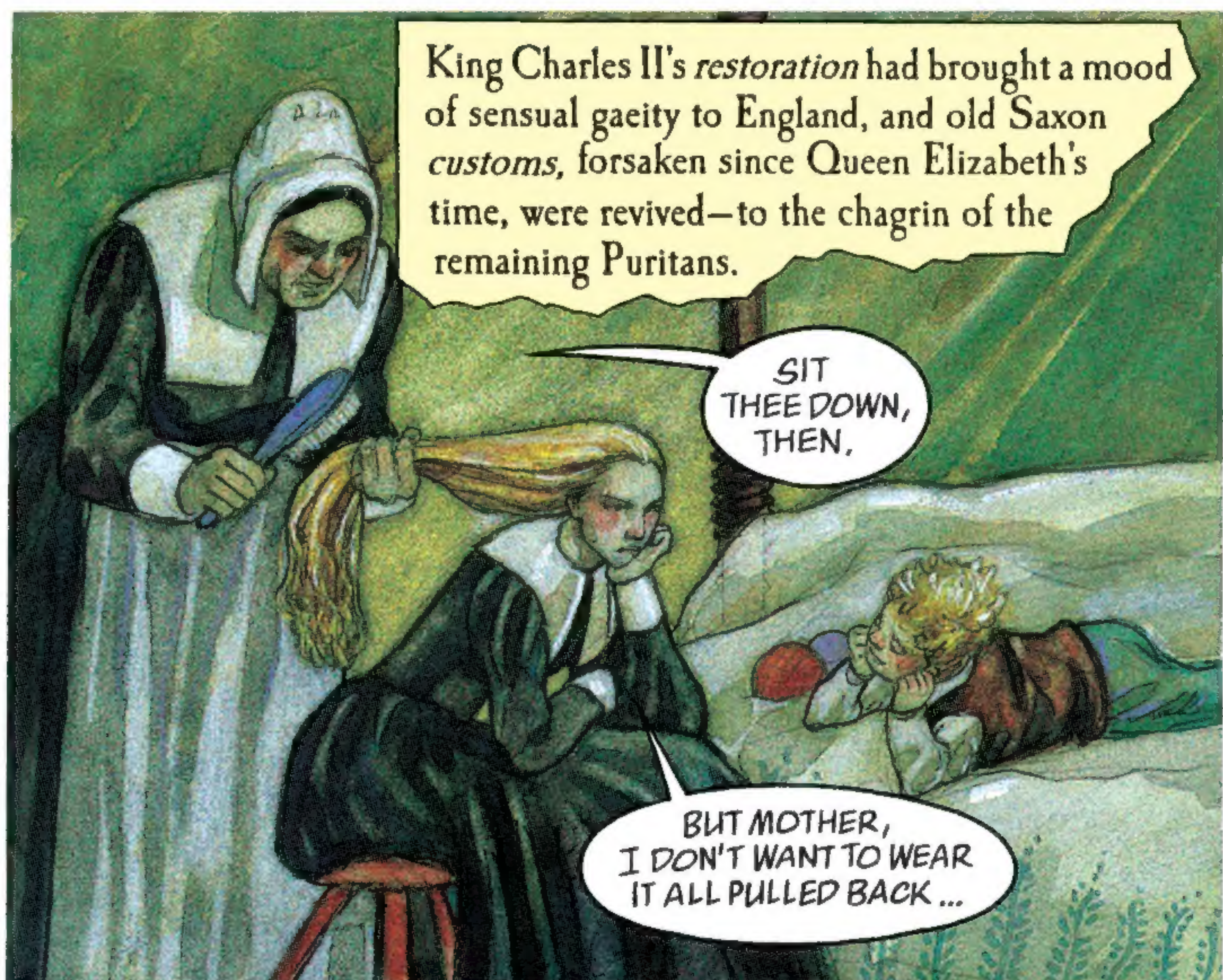
Child labour also fills
the silk mills, where
the constant clacking
of looms soon bestows
a *merciful* deafness.

In 1665, however, the folk
of Eyam toiled in the fields
and tended sheep, and if
a young girl worked a
loom, she did so by
her *own* hearth.

AND **THIS**
IS WHAT KEEPS
THEE FOR AN HOUR?
VANITY?



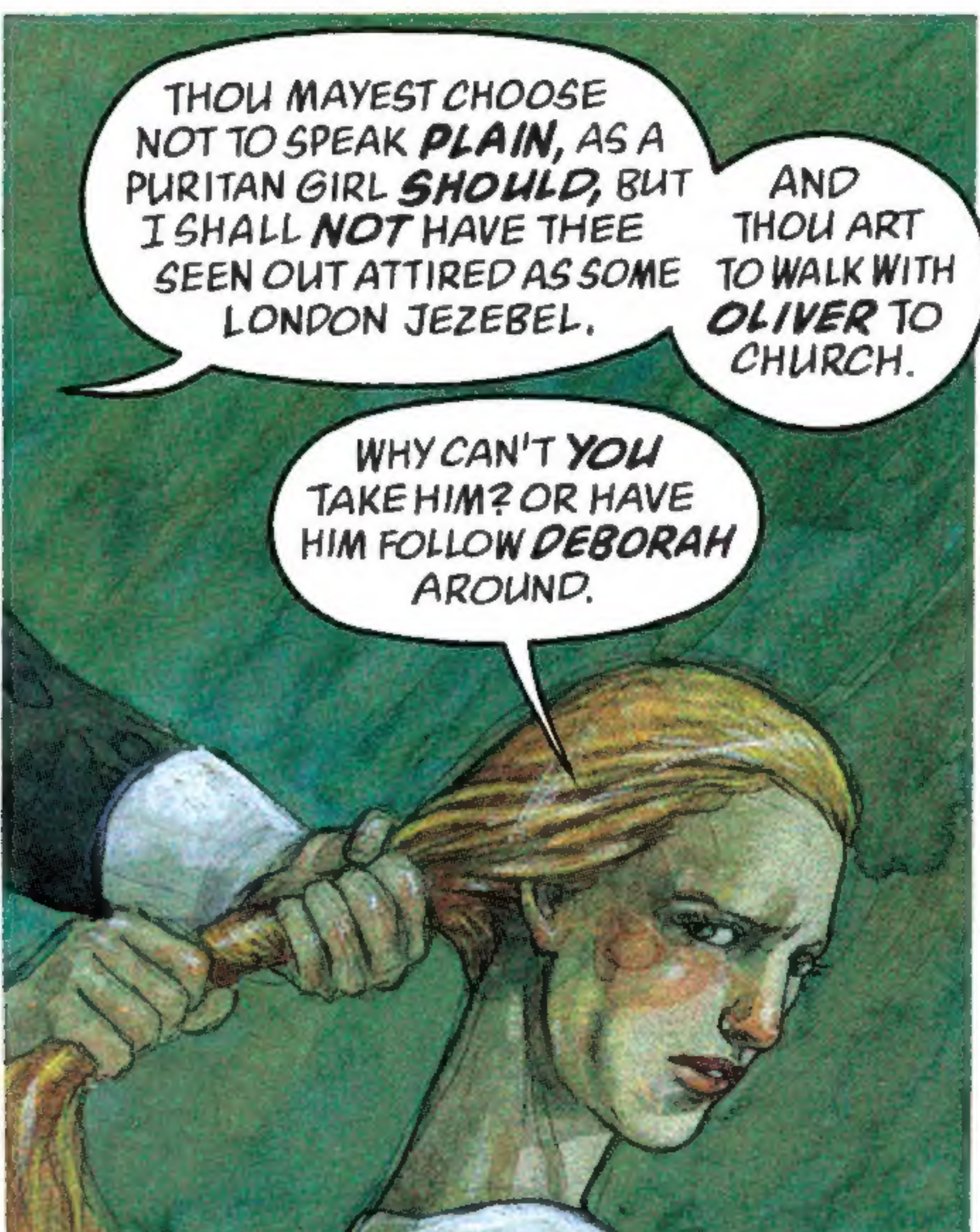
I SUPPOSE I'M
TO GO TO **CHURCH** WITH
MY HAIR UNCOMBED?



King Charles II's *restoration* had brought a mood
of sensual gaeity to England, and old Saxon
customs, forsaken since Queen Elizabeth's
time, were revived—to the chagrin of the
remaining Puritans.

SIT
THEE DOWN,
THEN,

BUT MOTHER,
I DON'T WANT TO WEAR
IT ALL PULLED BACK ...



THOU MAYEST CHOOSE
NOT TO SPEAK **PLAIN**, AS A
PURITAN GIRL **SHOULD**, BUT
I SHALL **NOT** HAVE THEE
SEEN OUT ATTIRED AS SOME
LONDON JEZEBEL.

AND
THOU ART
TO WALK WITH
OLIVER TO
CHURCH.

WHY CAN'T **YOU**
TAKE HIM? OR HAVE
HIM FOLLOW **DEBORAH**
AROUND.



DEBORAH IS THE
ELDEST, AND HAD TO
MIND **THEE** WHEN THOU
WERT SMALL. AS FOR
MYSELF, I WILL NOT SET
FOOT IN CHURCH
WHILST THAT **NEW**
RECTOR PRESIDES.



BLESSING THE CROPS
LIKE SOME **PAGAN**
PRIEST! 'TIS NOT THE
WAY **I** WAS TAUGHT.

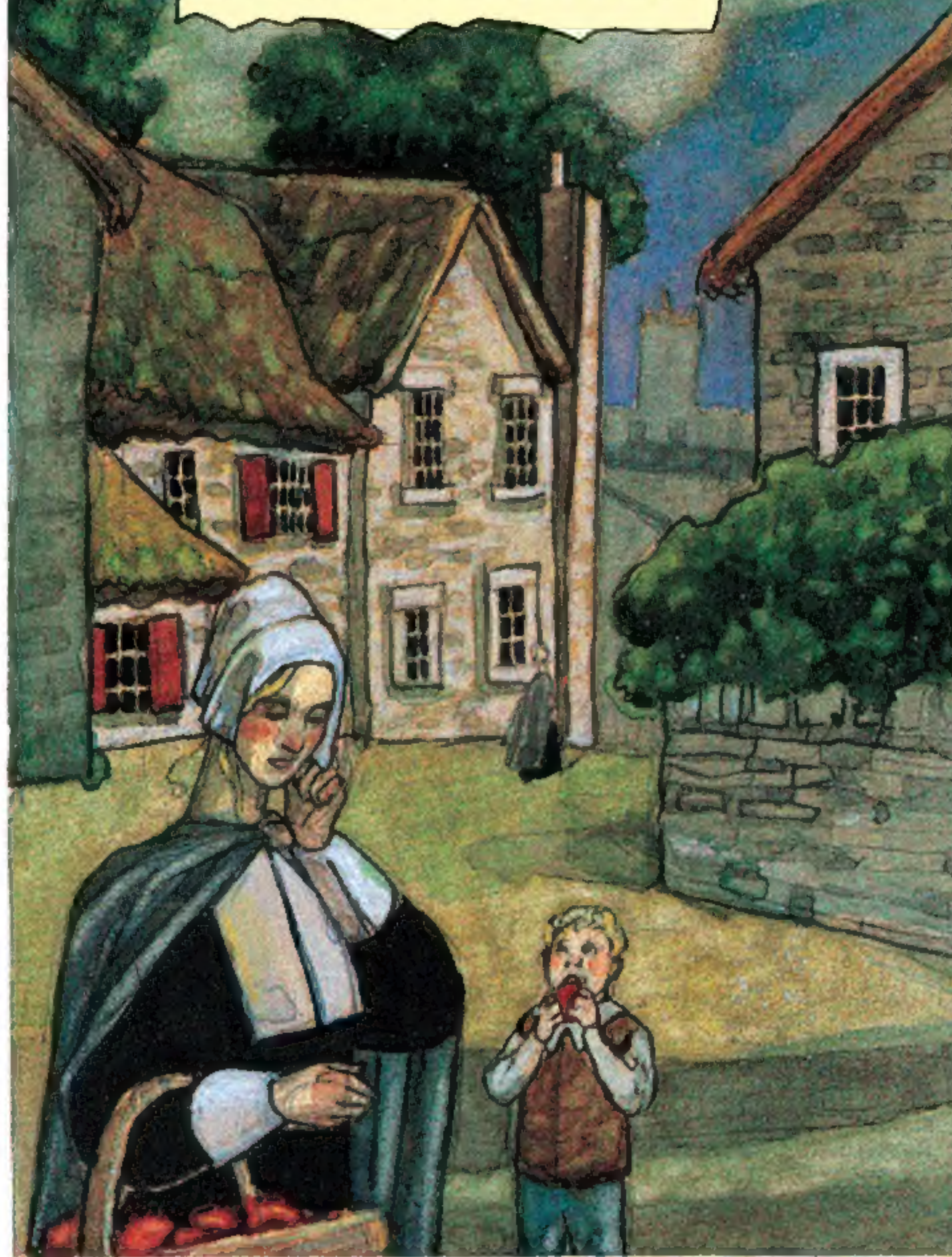
YET YOUNG
GIRLS ARE WHAT
THEY ARE, AND
CANNOT **ALWAYS**
BE AT HOME.

Ask any Englishman today what comes to mind when the phrase "*harvest festival*" is invoked, and he will describe an innocuous ceremony held in church.

Yet our quaint folk tradition is the remnant of a more ancient ritual, a relic of the *mysteries* Demeter taught her disciples at Eleusis.

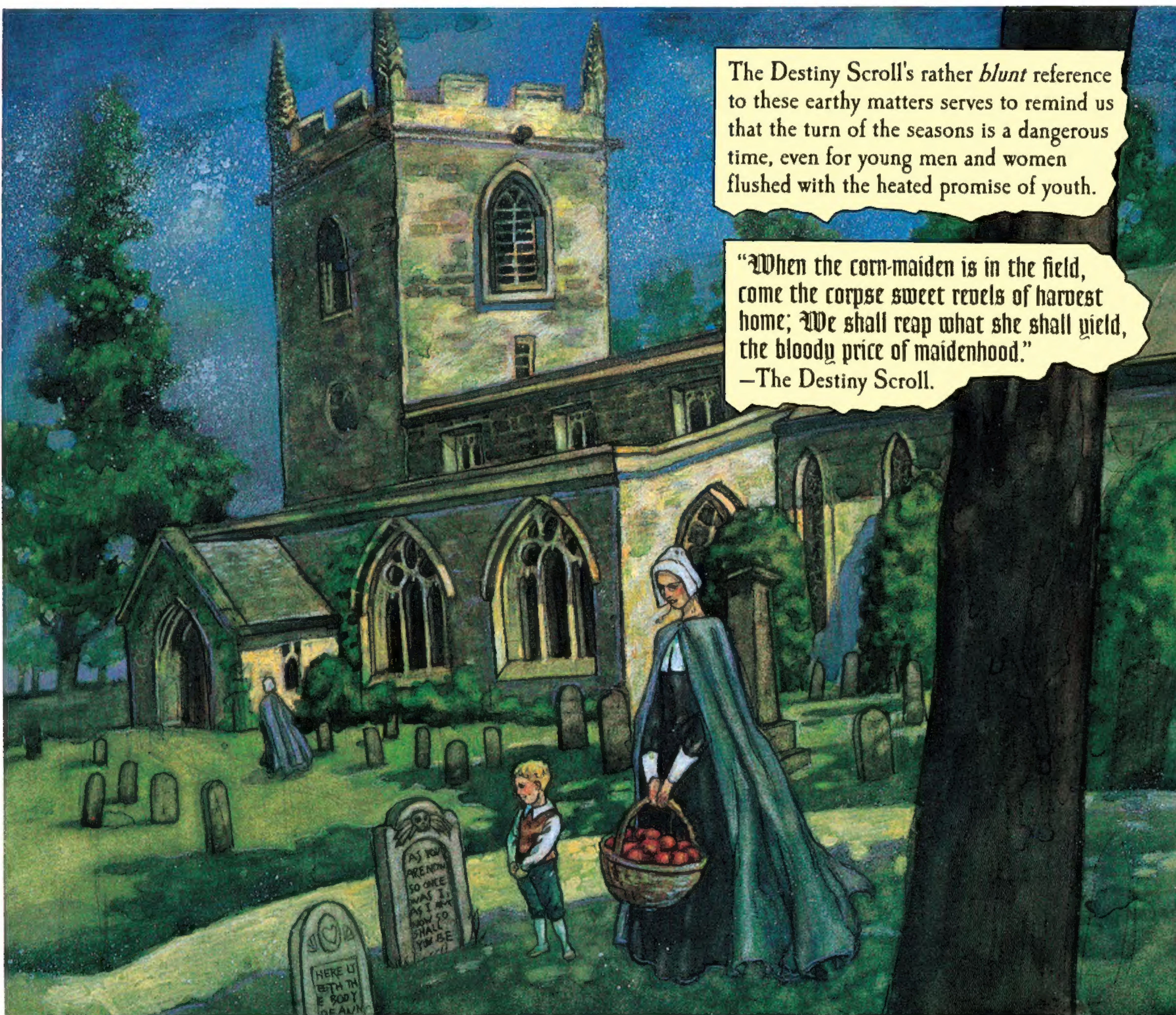


Mysteries of sustenance and *sacrifice*, rites of the maiden who stirred the senses of the lord of shadows and death.



The Destiny Scroll's rather *blunt* reference to these earthy matters serves to remind us that the turn of the seasons is a dangerous time, even for young men and women flushed with the heated promise of youth.

"When the corn-maiden is in the field, come the corpse sweet revels of harvest home; We shall reap what she shall yield, the bloody price of maidenhood."
—The Destiny Scroll.





I SAW THY SISTER DEBORAH ARRIVE EARLIER. A FINE YOUNG LADY, THAT ONE IS. MY EDWARD THINKS **VERY** HIGHLY OF HER.

A PITY YOUR FATHER DIDN'T LEAVE YOU GIRLS **MORE** IN THE WAY OF A DOWRY BEFORE HE DIED. STILL, THAT WAS HIS WAY-- SPEND NO MONEY, MAKE NO MONEY.

WE CAN'T **ALL** BE RICH, WIDOW COOPER.



IT'S **MISSUS** HADFIELD NOW, EMMOT.

FORGIVE ME, BUT IT SEEMS ONLY YESTERDAY YOUR FIRST HUSBAND PASSED ON.



I MUST SAY, THIS IS QUITE A TURNOUT, GIVEN THE SLIGHTLY... **EMPTY** LOOK OF THE CHURCH LAST SUNDAY.

I'M AFRAID THEY'LL **ALWAYS** COME OUT FOR A FESTIVAL. BUT THOU MUST NOT EXPECT MORE THAN **HALF** THIS NUMBER NEXT WEEK.



IS THAT SO? YOU SEEM VERY KNOWLEDGEABLE, MR. ...

STANLEY. THOMAS STANLEY.

I KNOW THAT NAME. WERE YOU NOT VICAR HERE BEFORE ME?

I WAS, UNTIL OUR NOBLE KING TOOK EXCEPTION TO MY POLITICS. BUT I HAVE CHOSEN TO REMAIN HERE.



THIS VILLAGE IS MY HOME, FOR ALL ITS FAULTS.

AS FOR THY SERVICES, TAKE HEART. GIVE IT TIME AND SOME **CATASTROPHE** OR ANOTHER WILL OCCUR. THEN THEY WILL **FLOCK** TO CHURCH.



HAVE A **CARE**,
EMMOT. THE WHOLE
VILLAGE KNOWS THY
SHAMELESS DESIRE
FOR ROLAND
TORRE.



LEARN TO BE
MODEST. FOR NO
MAN WORTH HIS **SALT**
WILL COURT A GIRL WHO'S
BEEN MEETING HIM
AWAY AT CUCKLET
DELF.



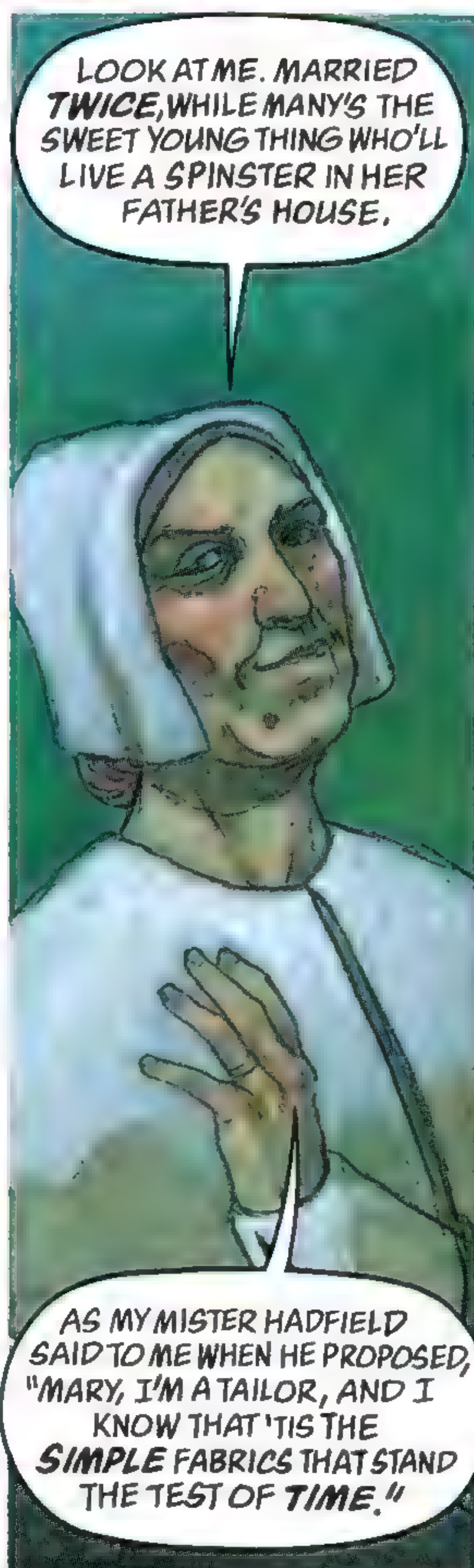
IT **HAPPENED** I
WAS WALKING THERE
AND SO WAS HE! I
NEVER...

WELL, TIME WILL
TELL, WILL IT **NOT**,
EMMOT? BUT THAT'S
NO WAY TO CATCH A
HUSBAND, MARK
MY WORDS.



AND **YOU** KNOW ALL
ABOUT **THAT**, DO YOU NOT,
MISSUS HADFIELD?

INDEED I DO,
YOU YOUNG GIRLS
THINK ALL MEN WANT
IS A PRETTY FACE
AND A SLENDER
WAIST, BUT **YOU'LL**
SOON LEARN
BETTER.



LOOK AT ME. MARRIED
TWICE, WHILE MANY'S THE
SWEET YOUNG THING WHO'LL
LIVE A SPINSTER IN HER
FATHER'S HOUSE.

AS MY MISTER HADFIELD
SAID TO ME WHEN HE PROPOSED,
"MARY, I'M A TAILOR, AND I
KNOW THAT 'TIS THE
SIMPLE FABRICS THAT STAND
THE TEST OF **TIME**."



AND I ADMIRE YOU
FOR FOLLOWING YOUR
HEART, MISSUS HAD-
FIELD.

I'VE NEVER PAID **ANY**
MIND TO THOSE WHO SAY
YOUR HUSBAND WAS
SCARCELY **COLD** IN THE
GROUND WHILST YOU
STOOD AT THE ALTAR.







"FOR ON THIS DAY OF
THANKSGIVING, WE
SHOULD TEMPER OUR
REJOICING WITH THE
KNOWLEDGE THAT
ELSEWHERE,
PESTILENCE REIGNS.



"I HAVE HEARD REPORTS
THAT THE VERY **AIR** IN
LONDON IS POISONED
WITH THE FUMES OF
CORRUPTION, AND NO
DOCTOR'S HERBALS
CAN DISPEL THE **SMELL**
OF DEATH.

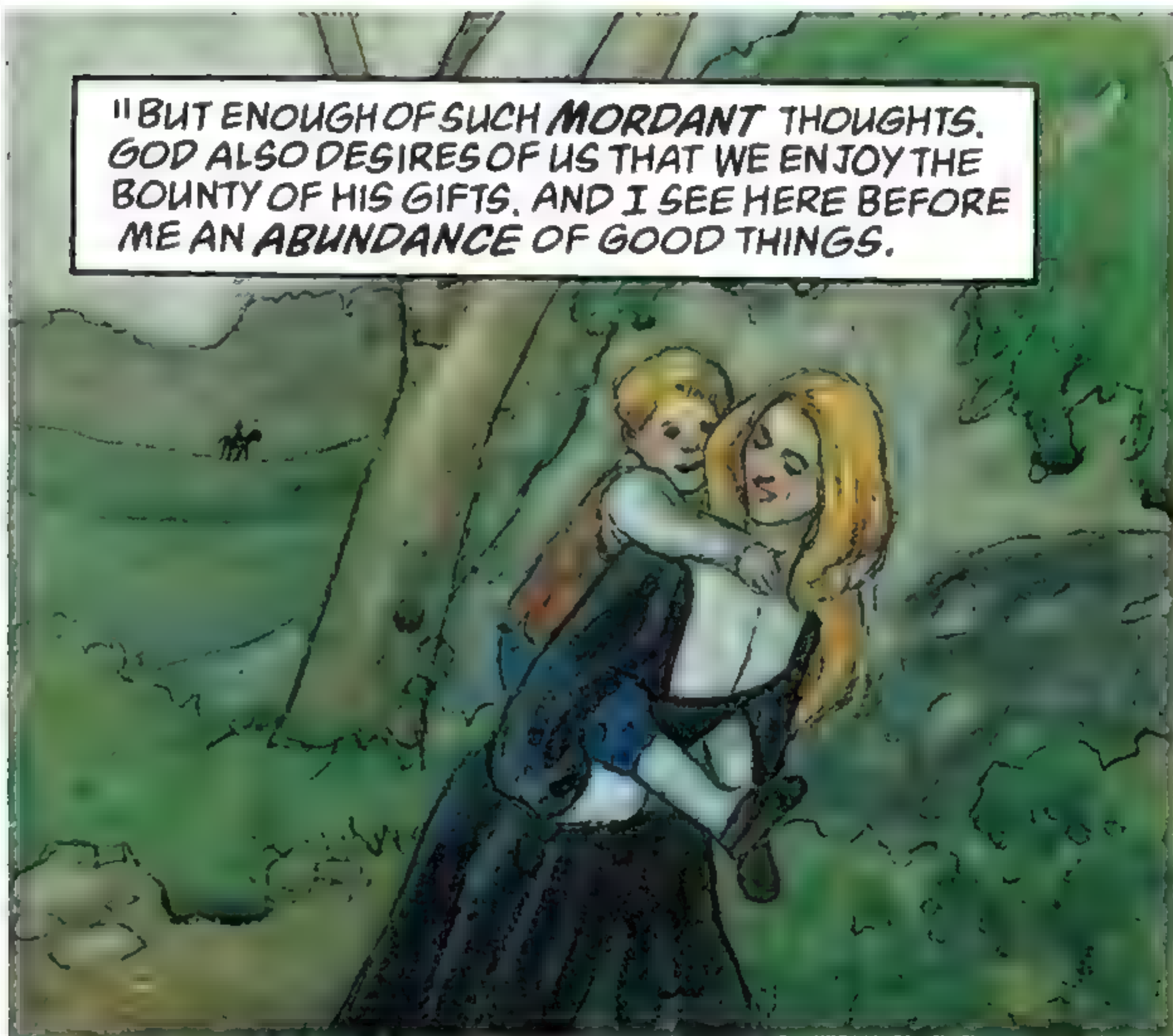


"MOST OF THE **UPPER CLASSES**
HAVE FLED THE CITY ALONG WITH
THE KING, WHILST THOSE WHO
REMAIN MUST LOOK TO HEAVEN
FOR THEIR DELIVERANCE.



"YET STILL THE PLAGUE FINDS
ITS WAY INTO THEIR HOMES."

"BUT ENOUGH OF SUCH *MORDANT* THOUGHTS. GOD ALSO DESIRES OF US THAT WE ENJOY THE BOUNTY OF HIS GIFTS. AND I SEE HERE BEFORE ME AN *ABUNDANCE* OF GOOD THINGS.

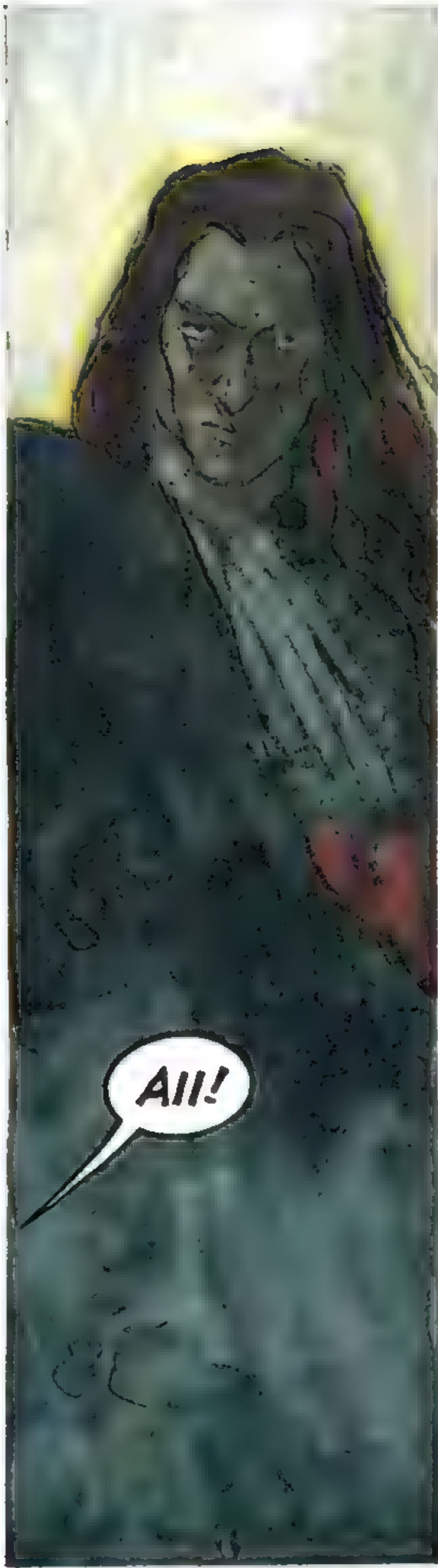


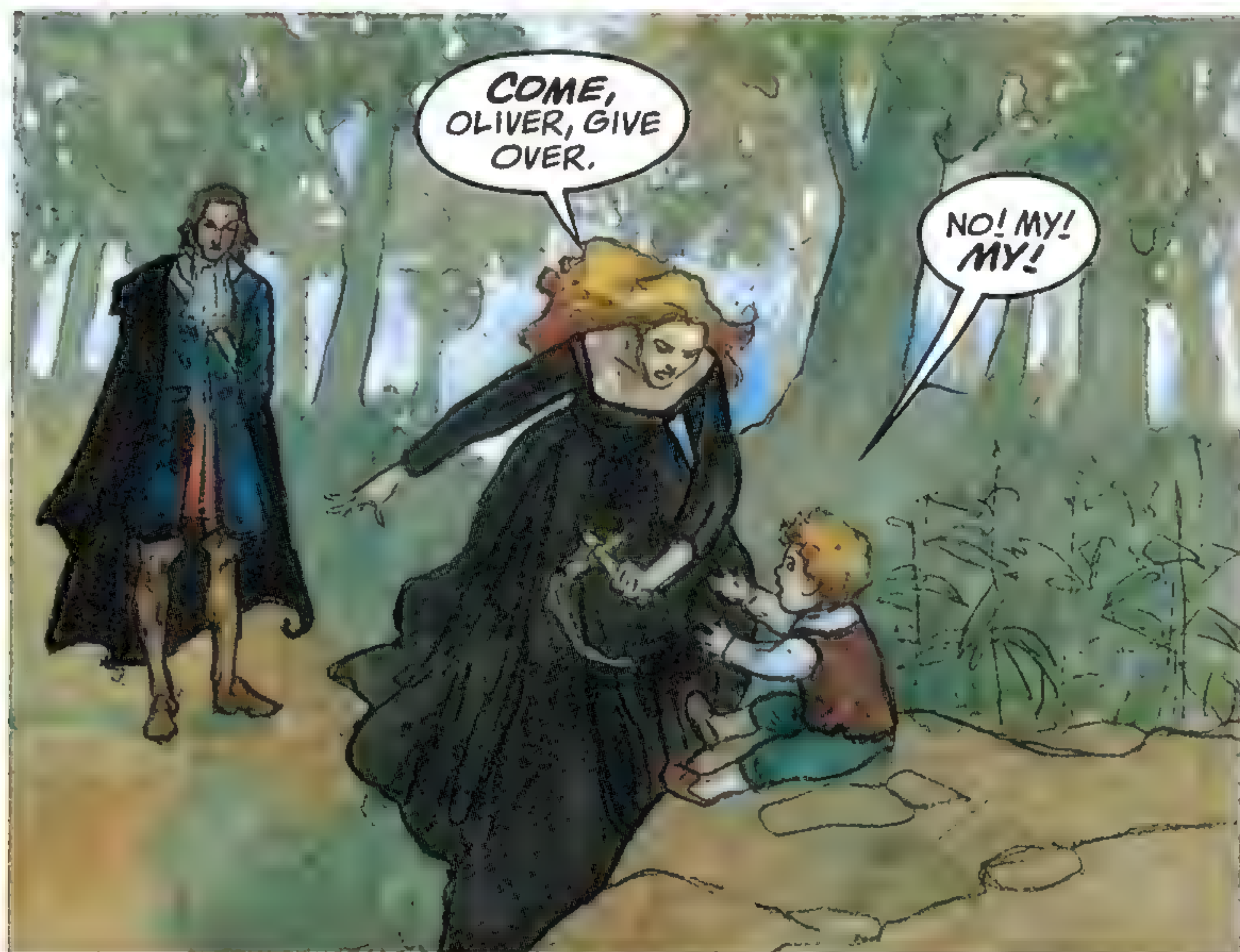
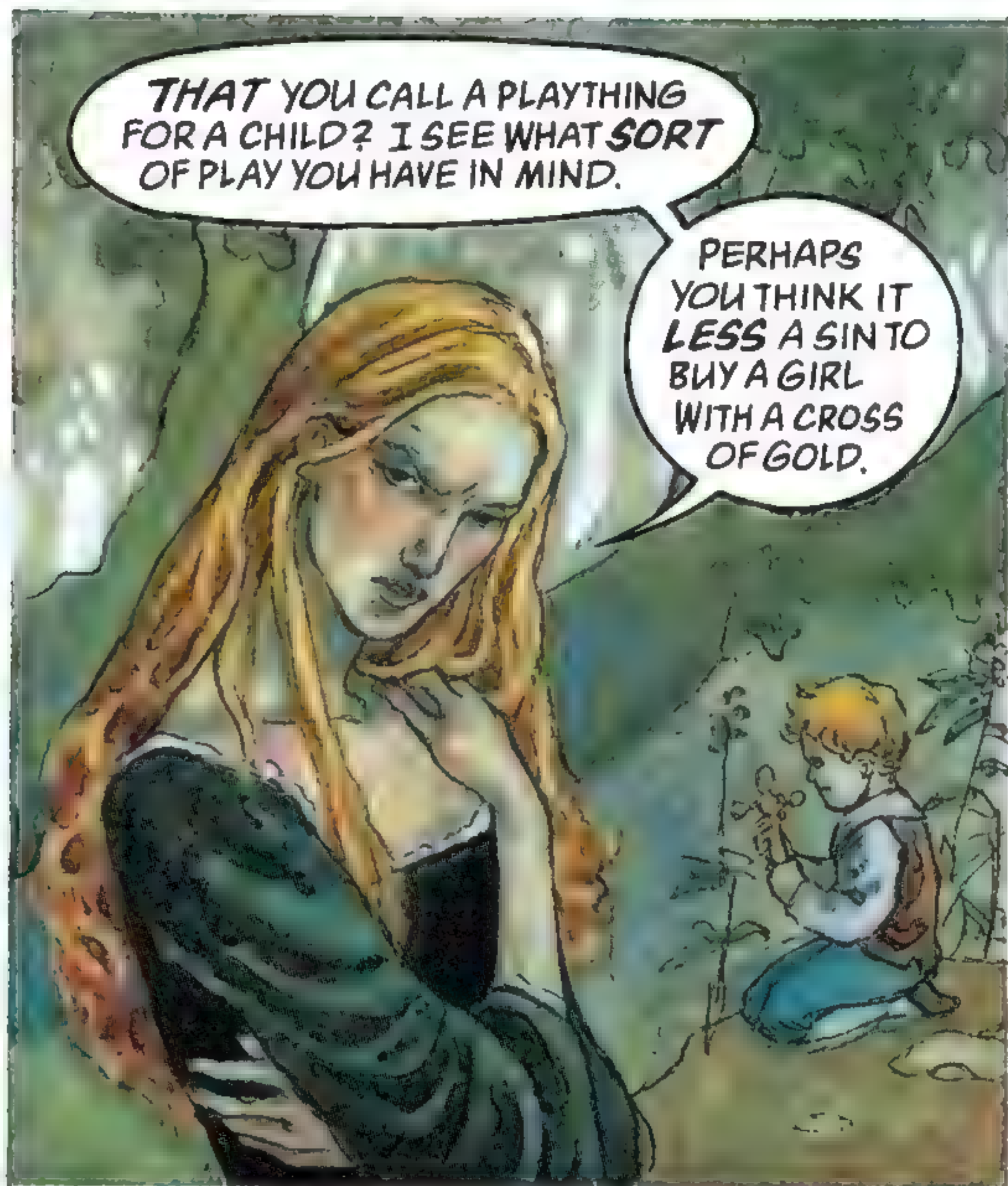
"SO LET US NOW OPEN OUR PSALM BOOKS TO 'ALL THINGS BRIGHT AND BEAUTIFUL'.

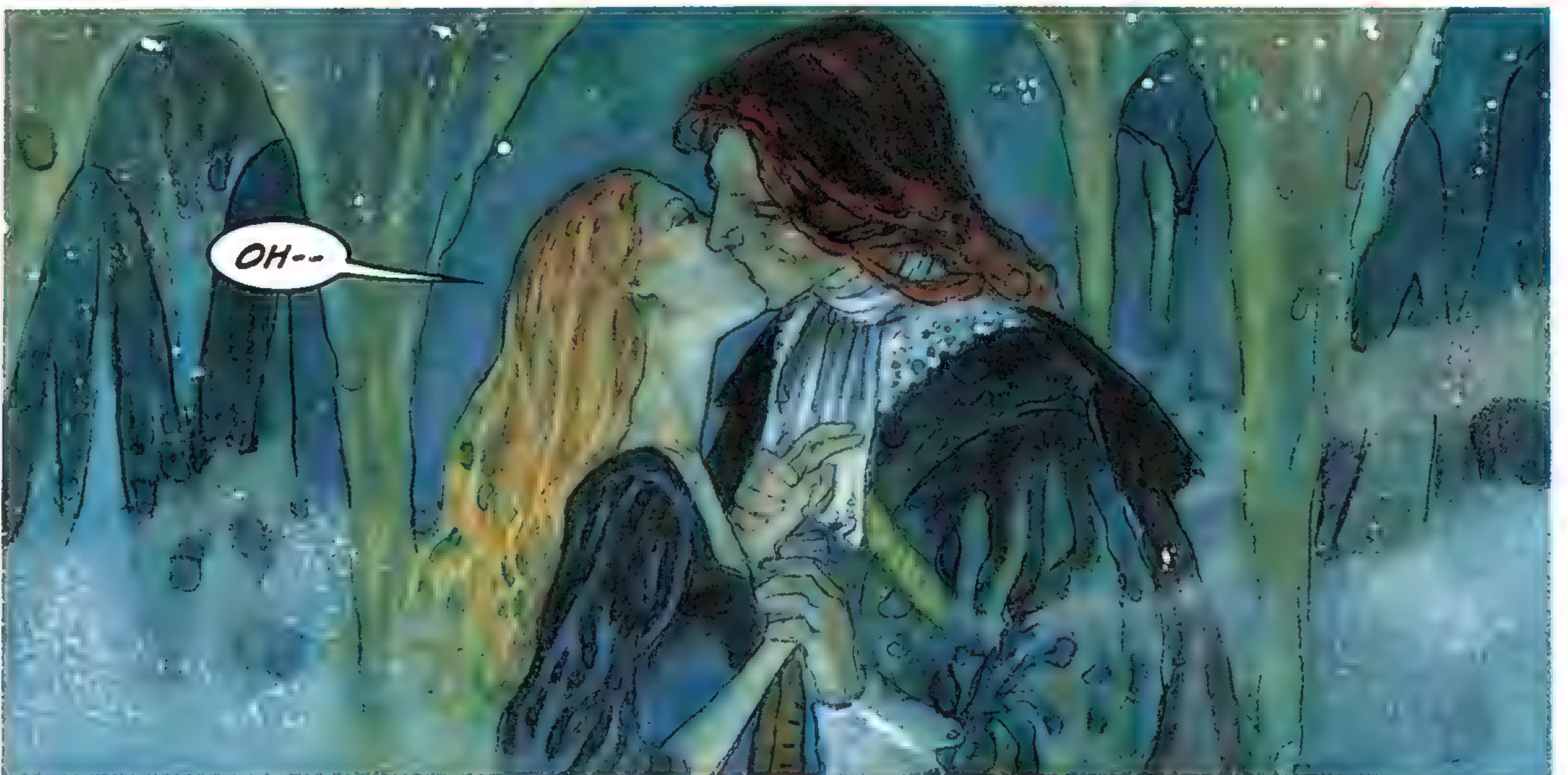
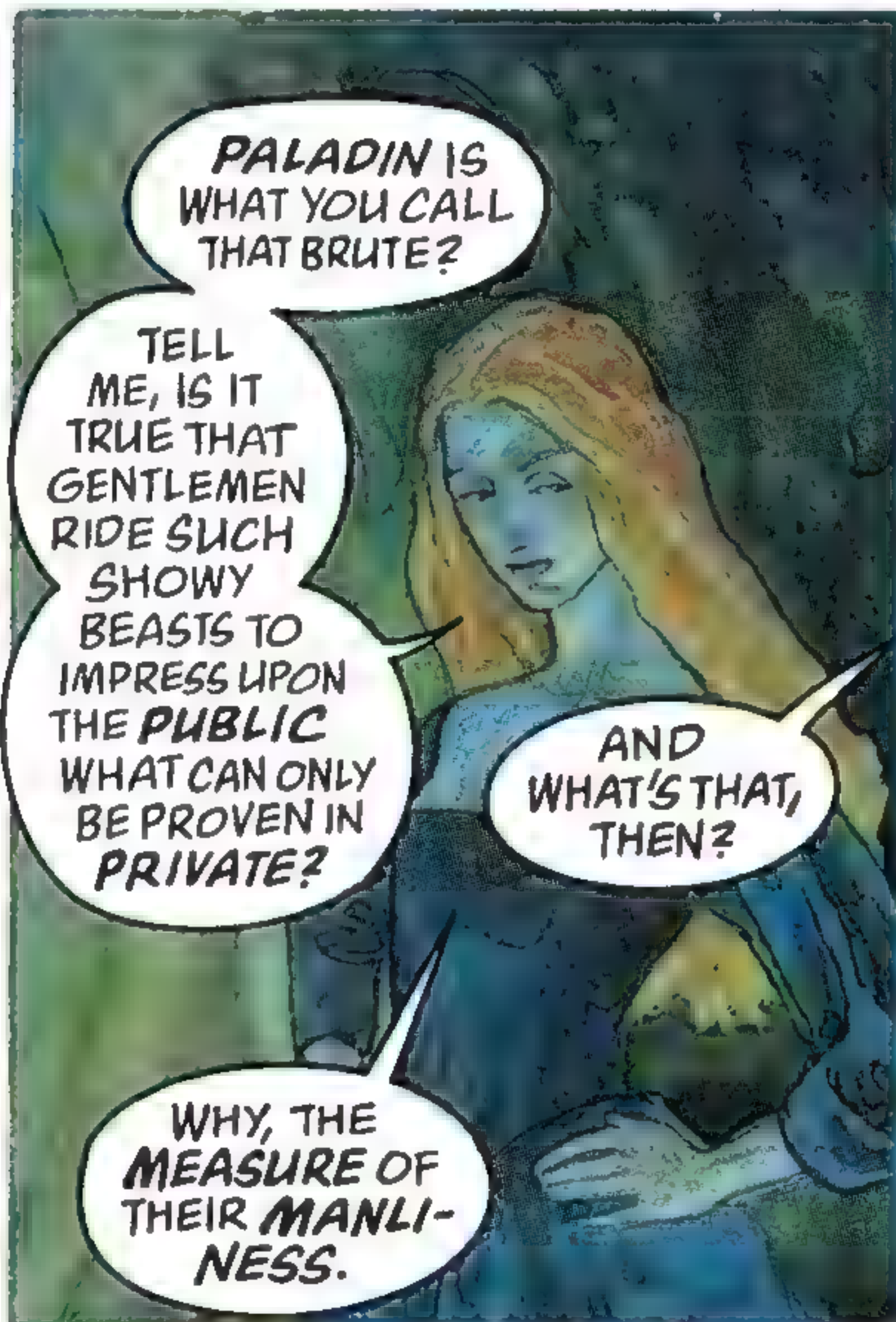


"AND LET US PRAY."











DON'T YOU KNOW NEVER TO KISS **STRANGERS**, LASS? WE HAVEN'T EVEN BEEN PROPERLY INTRODUCED.

I'M **EMMOT**.
EMMOT SIDDAL.

I AM
CALLED JOHN
RYDER.



AND HOW OLD ARE YOU,,, EMMOT?

SIXTEEN.

GOD HAVE MERCY, SIXTEEN. WHEN I WAS SIXTEEN MY MOTHER TRIED TO KILL ME.

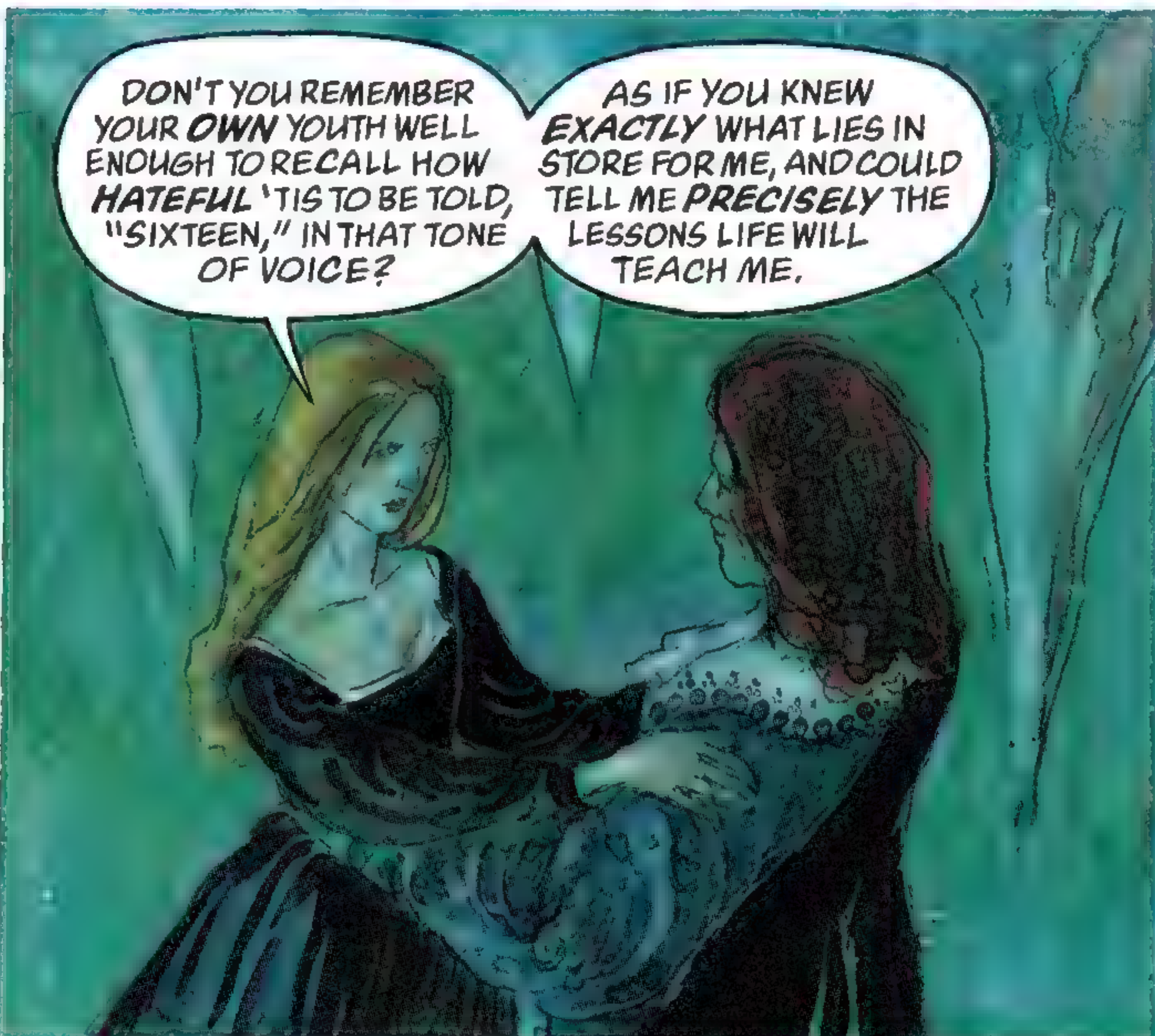


BUT, AS MR. SHEKSPER HAD IT, "THAT WAS IN ANOTHER COUNTRY, AND BESIDES, THE WENCH IS DEAD."

AND **SINCE** THAT TIME, I HAVE HAD GOOD CAUSE TO WISH MY MOTHER **HAD MURD--**



--MMPH.



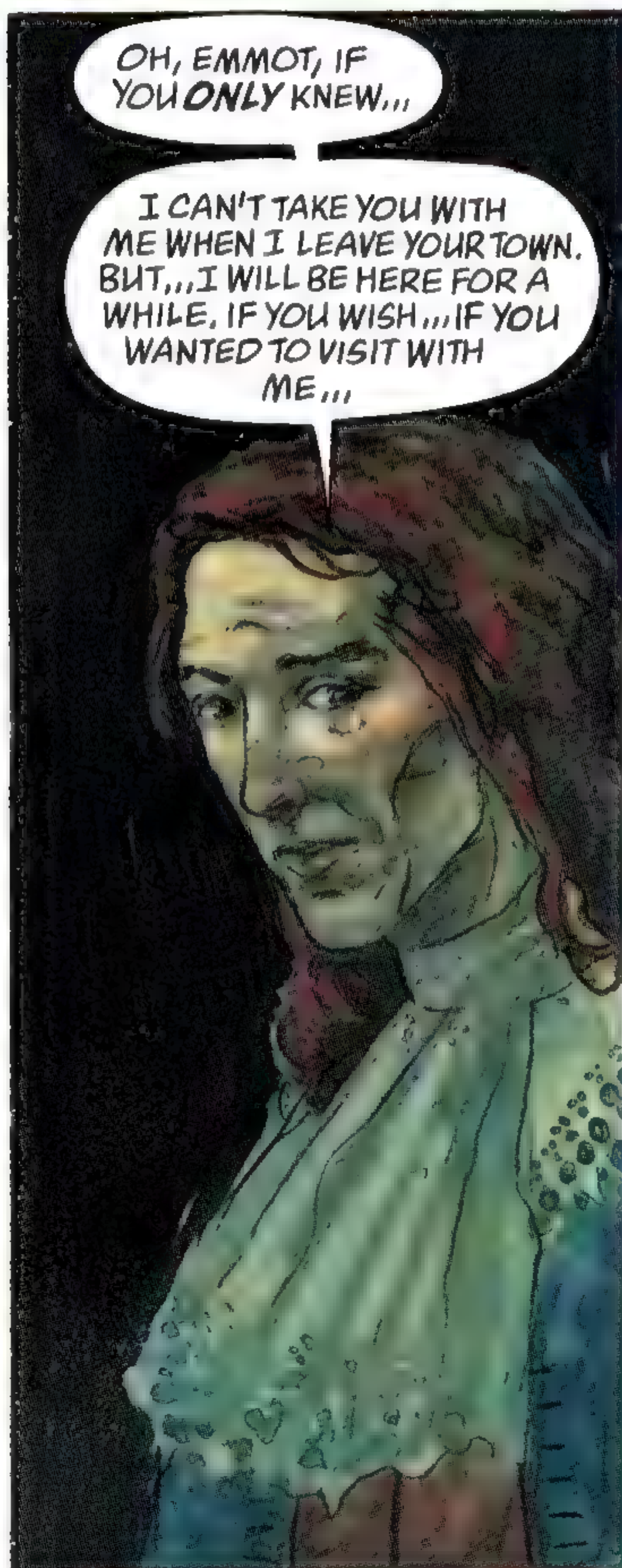
DON'T YOU REMEMBER YOUR **OWN** YOUTH WELL ENOUGH TO RECALL HOW **HATEFUL** 'TIS TO BE TOLD, "SIXTEEN," IN THAT TONE OF VOICE?

AS IF YOU KNEW **EXACTLY** WHAT LIES IN STORE FOR ME, AND COULD TELL ME **PRECISELY** THE LESSONS LIFE WILL TEACH ME.



YET THE **TRUTH** IS, PEOPLE FORGET HOW MUCH THEY KNEW AT SIXTEEN, HOW MUCH THEY **UNDERSTOOD** OF THINGS.

CAUGHT UP IN ALL HER TASKS, MY MOTHER SEES **NOTHING** BUT WHAT IS RIGHT BEFORE HER, THINKS OF **NOTHING** THAT IS NOT AT HAND.





EMMOT, I AM NOT WHAT YOU *THINK* I AM. I AM NOT WHAT I APPEAR.

I AM A CREATURE TOO OLD AND FOUL AND *WRETCHED* FOR ANY YOUNG GIRL TO TOUCH, SAVE ONE, AND *SHE* SHALL LEAD ME TO MY GRAVE.



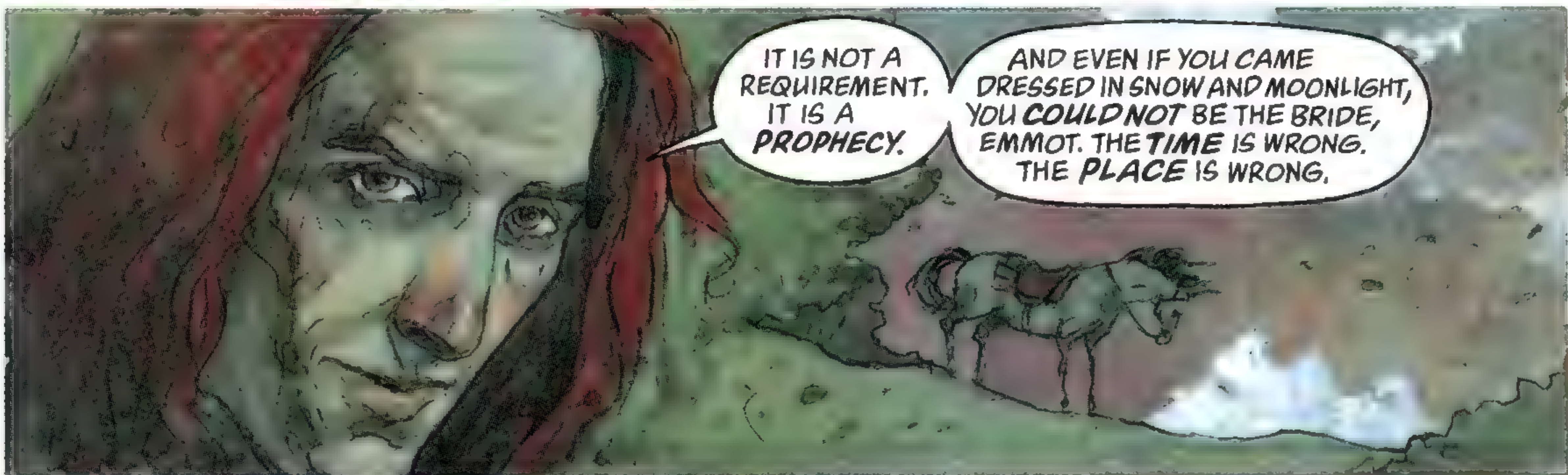
AND *WHO* IS SHE, THIS FATAL BRIDE?



I REALLY CAN'T SAY, NOT HAVING MET HER. ALL I KNOW OF HER IS THAT SHE WILL WEAR WHITE.

AND IS *THIS* THE ONLY REQUIREMENT YOU HAVE FOR A WIFE?

THAT SHE WEAR *WHITE* WHEN YOU MEET HER?



IT IS NOT A REQUIREMENT. IT IS A *PROPHECY*.

AND EVEN IF YOU CAME DRESSED IN SNOW AND MOONLIGHT, YOU *COULD NOT* BE THE BRIDE, EMMOT. THE *TIME* IS WRONG. THE *PLACE* IS WRONG.



YOU MUST THINK ME *MAD*, BUT THERE ARE *THINGS* I KNOW...



EVENTS FORETOLD THAT I AM ALL BUT POWERLESS TO CHANGE.



WHAT IS THIS?

YOU *MIGHT* WANT TO CALL IT A HISTORY LESSON-- BUT YOU'LL FIND NOT *ALL* THE HISTORY HAS HAPPENED YET.



I BEGIN TO THINK YOU REALLY *MUST* BE MAD. *ANOTHER* GIFT?

YOU WOULD NOT TAKE THE GOLDEN CROSS, BUT PERHAPS YOU WILL CONSENT TO WEAR *THIS* AS A REMEMBRANCE OF ME.



IT SMELLS... AS IF IT COMES FROM *FAR* AWAY.

IT DOES. THE HERBS AND FLOWERS IT CONTAINS GROW IN BUT *ONE GARDEN* IN ALL CREATION, AND EACH INGREDIENT POSSESSES HEALING POWERS. IF OTHERS SHOULD FALL ILL... IT WILL *PROTECT* YOU.

BE WARNED, THOUGH: IT WILL *ONLY* PROTECT YOU, SO DO NOT GIVE IT AWAY.



"YET IF YOU FIND THAT YOU HAVE *NEED* OF ME, COME HERE, TO CUCKLET DELF, AND TAKE A PINCH FROM THE CONTENTS OF THE POUCH TO SPRINKLE ON THE CAVERN GROUND, THEN PALADIN WILL *KNOW* TO BRING ME TO YOU."



"SO BE ON YOUR GUARD, EMMOT."

ARE THOSE THE NEW FABRICS, GEORGE?



AYE. TH-THAT IT IS. JUST ARRIVED ALL TH- THE WAY FROM L-LONDON TOWN.



HOW'S *THAT* THEN? FIT FOR A QUEEN.

OR A BRIDE.



IT'S Y-YOURS, THEN. T-TT-TAKE IT.

OH, GEORGE, HOW *COULD* I? I HAVE NO COIN TO PURCHASE IT, AND BESIDES, MOTHER WOULD NEVER PERMIT ME TO WEAR IT.



H-HAVE IT ANYWAY, AS A GIFT. AND P-PERHAPS S-SOMEDAY YOU WILL W-WEAR IT AS A *B-BRIDE*.



IF YOU *REALLY* THINK I MAY,,, BUT TELL ME, GEORGE, WHY IS THE FABRIC *DAMP*?

I THINK THE BOX MUST HAVE BEEN *PACKED* POORLY, OR IN GREAT HASTE, FOR EVERY LAST INCH OF MATERIAL SEEMS TO HAVE GOTTEN *SOAKED*.



STILL, AT LEAST ALL THAT D-DOUSING SHOULD GET RID OF THE FLEAS.

THE BOOK OF DESTINY,
GRIMOIRE PUBLISHERS,
GREAT BRITAIN, 1899:

Every July 1, the town-
folk of Eyam gather
to commemorate the
plague.

They retell the old story of how
George Viccars, journeyman
tailor, received material from
London on 3 September and,
finding it damp, hung it
out to dry.

WHAT'S
THAT RACKET?
IF YOU'RE
MALINGERING,
BOY...

This, of course, released the
plague-bearing fleas which had
formerly *infested* it.

Four days later, Viccars was dead.
A fortnight later, young Edward
Cooper followed him into the
earth. His mother buried him in
cloth of velvet, and then
commenced to sew herself
a shroud.

As September grew darker and
colder, five more neighbours were
buried in the churchyard.

By the end of *October*,
twenty-three had
perished.

AS YOU ARE
NOW SO ONCE
WAS I.
AS I AM
NOW SO
SHALL YOU
BE.

Throughout the day, the villagers of
Eyam would stop in their tracks when
they heard the chiming of the Passing
Bell: three times for a man, twice
for a woman...

...and once for a *child*.



For months, the steady toll of death rang out again and again. And then, one day, there was a blessed silence.

ARE YOU COMING TO CHURCH TODAY, MOTHER?

IT'S THE CHRISTMAS SERVICE. SURELY YOU'LL WANT TO COME FOR THAT?

OR JUST TO SEE DEBORAH AND OLIVER'S GRAVES?

I SEE THEM IN MY DREAMS, CHILD, SITTING ATOP THEIR COFFINS...



"...ASKING WHY *WE* HAVE SURVIVED."

It was the chill heart of winter, when most of us anticipate the onset of some illness, great or small.

Yet, for Eyam, this frozen time brought a fragile *peace* to their village.



Some called it God's *mercy* on them: but, for Emmot Siddal, who had lost her sister and brother to the plague, it was no such thing.



For her, it was an uncertain blessing, cryptic as a *love* letter written in three dead languages.





STANLEY!

WHY, MOMPESON, I HADN'T EXPECTED THEE TILL MUCH LATER. ART THOU PREPARED TO DISCUSS THE SERMON ALREADY?

NO, NO, IT'S NOT THAT.



IT'S THIS MANUSCRIPT. I'VE MADE OUT SOME LATIN AND GREEK, BUT I'M NO SCHOLAR. CAN YOU MAKE ANY SENSE OF THIS?



"BETWIXT DOG AND WOLF, HE SHALL RIDE..."

YES, YES. I'VE GOT THAT PART.

HMM... THIS APPEARS TO BE HEBREW...



WHERE DID THIS COME FROM?

I DON'T REALLY KNOW. THE SIDDAL GIRL BROUGHT IT TO THE CHURCHYARD WITH HER--

--BUT SHE DIDN'T SAY WHERE SHE'D FOUND IT.

WHAT DOES IT SAY?



IF I AM TRANSLATING THIS CORRECTLY, IT SAYS THAT DEATH... THE DEATH, MIND, NOT JUST DEATH --IS STILL WITH US.

AND THE PALE RIDER IS WAITING FOR THE TRUTH.



THE PALE RIDER IS PESTILENCE, IS IT NOT? WHAT KIND OF TRUTH WOULD HE WANT? CHRIST'S TRUTH?



I CANNOT SAY, MOMPESON. ALL THAT IS WRITTEN IS THE WORD ITSELF. SEE? 'TIS THE SAME AS THAT SIDDAL GIRL'S CHRISTIAN NAME-- EMMOT.



"FOR IN APRIL THE **VERMIN**
STIR FROM THEIR DENS, ROUSE
THEMSELVES FROM THEIR LITTLE
GRAVES AND WANDER OUT
ONCE MORE."

THE BOOK OF DESTINY,
GRIMOIRE PUBLISHERS,
GREAT BRITAIN, 1899:

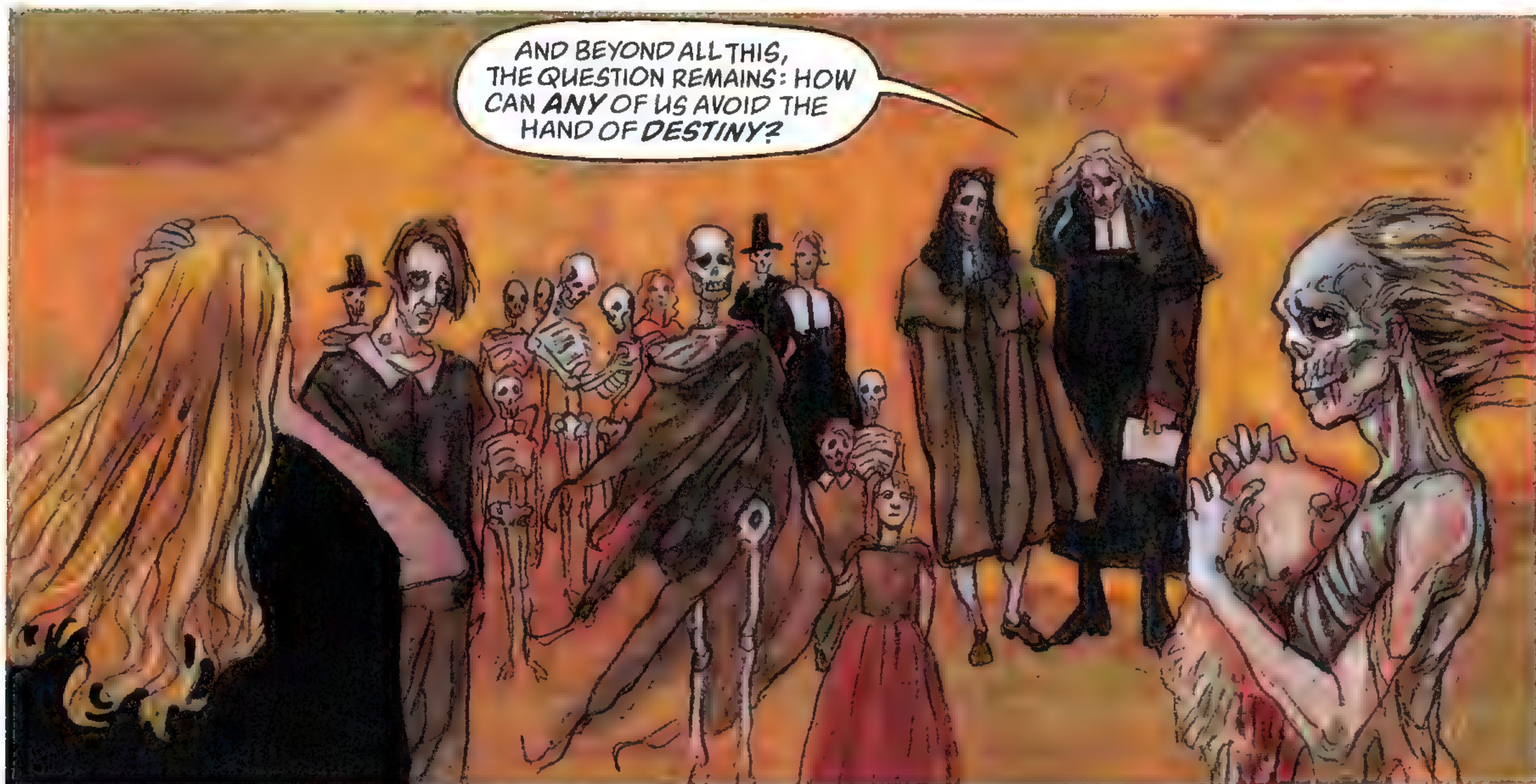
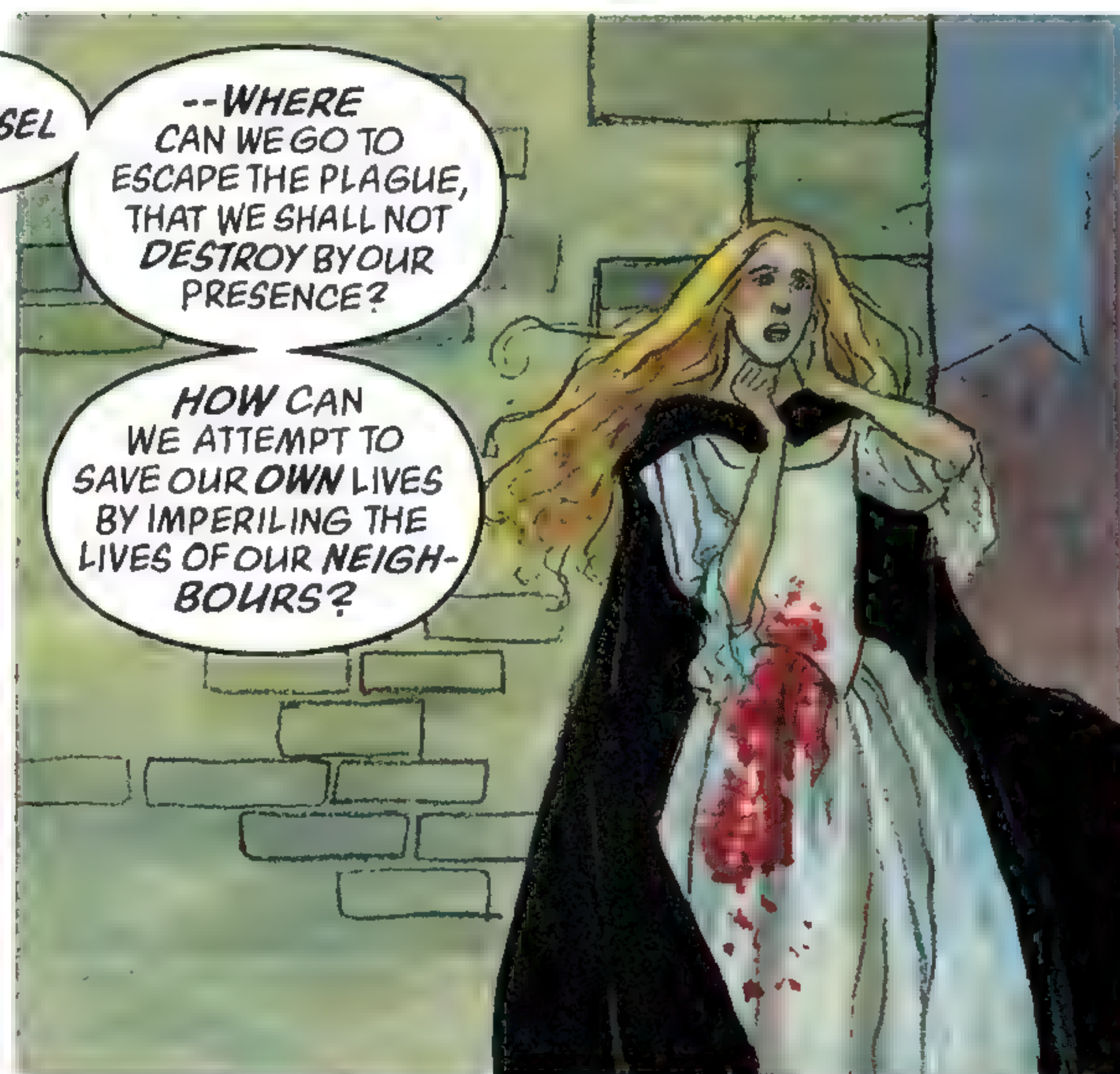
Like another young woman
who lived three centuries
before her, Emmot set out
to witness an ancient ritual
that celebrated the seasonal
cycle of death and rebirth.

In the Eyam version, a two-legged "ram" was
usually sacrificed by a "butcher" – often the
victim's closest relative or friend.

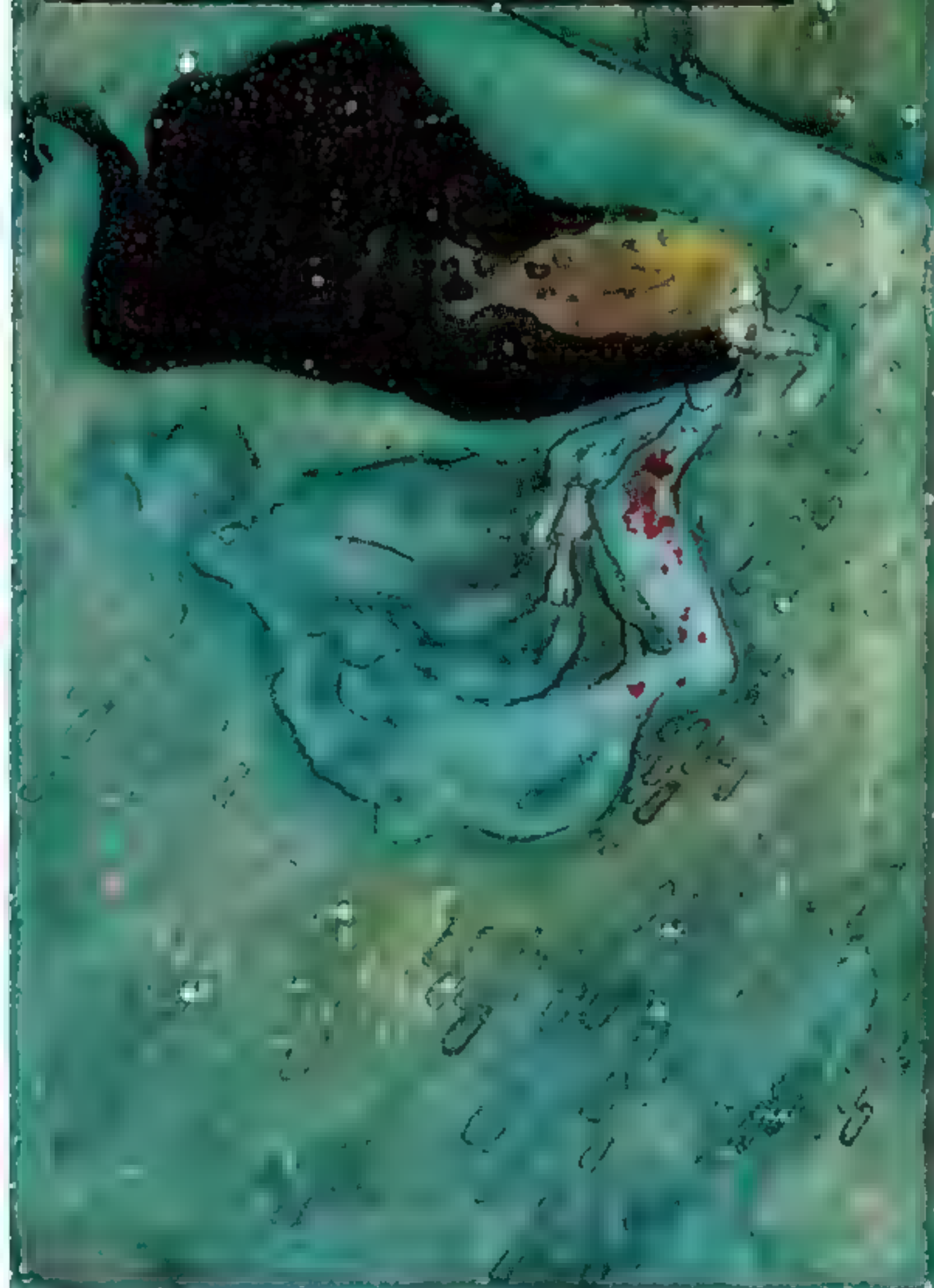
The ram's blood was caught
in a basin held by "Brother
Doom" or "Father Destiny"
– a man with a blackened
face or hood.

After the death, of course, came
the resurrection: the magical
victory of light over darkness.



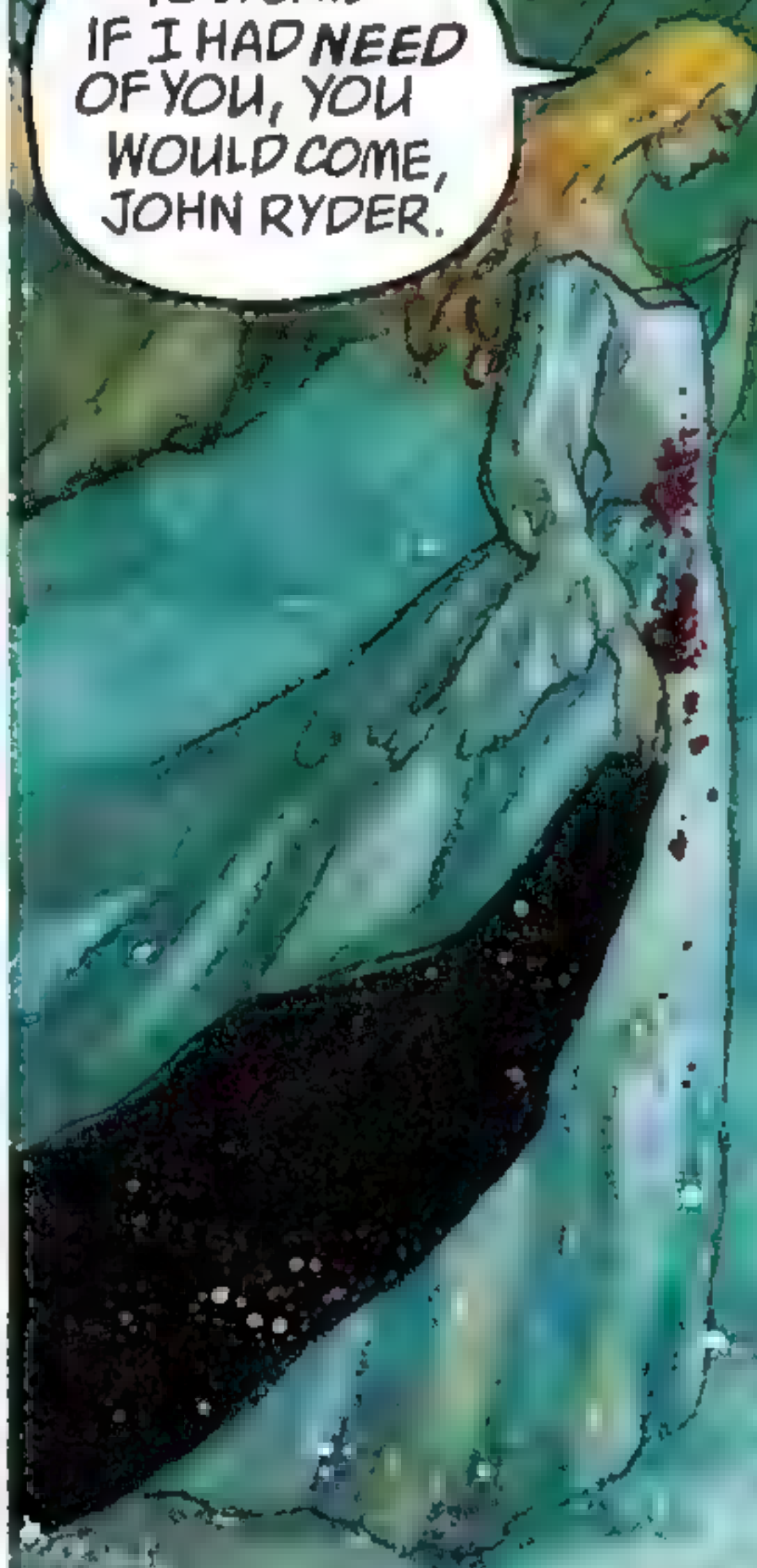


"SO I SAY: LET **NO** MAN GO FARTHER ABROAD THAN THE BOUNDARY STONE. THE EARL OF DEVONSHIRE HATH AGREED TO LEAVE US FOOD AND MEDICAL STUFFS THERE. WE NEED HAVE NO FEAR OF NEGLECT OR STARVATION.



"IF WE **SHOULD** FIND UPON OUR BODIES THE **TOKENS** OF THE PLAGUE, WE SHOULD **CONFINE** OURSELVES."

YOU SAID IF I HAD **NEED** OF YOU, YOU WOULD COME, JOHN RYDER.



"AND IF WE **DIE**, WE SHOULD SUFFER OURSELVES TO BE **BURIED** IN UNCONSECRATED GROUND."

WELL, I AM **SUMMONING** YOU.



WILL YOU COME?







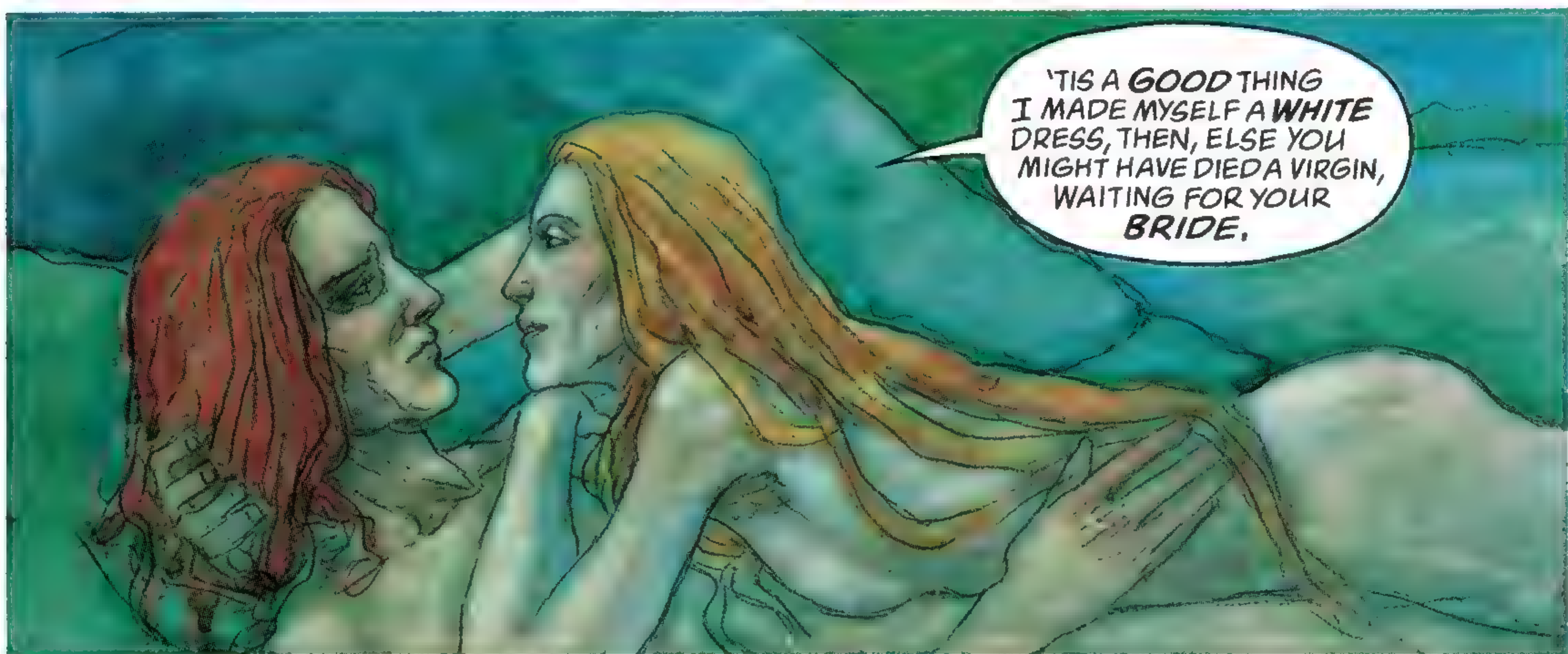


EMMOT?

MMM.



I HAVE NEVER BEEN WITH A WOMAN BEFORE.



'TIS A **GOOD** THING I MADE MYSELF A **WHITE** DRESS, THEN, ELSE YOU MIGHT HAVE DIED A VIRGIN, WAITING FOR YOUR **BRIDE**.



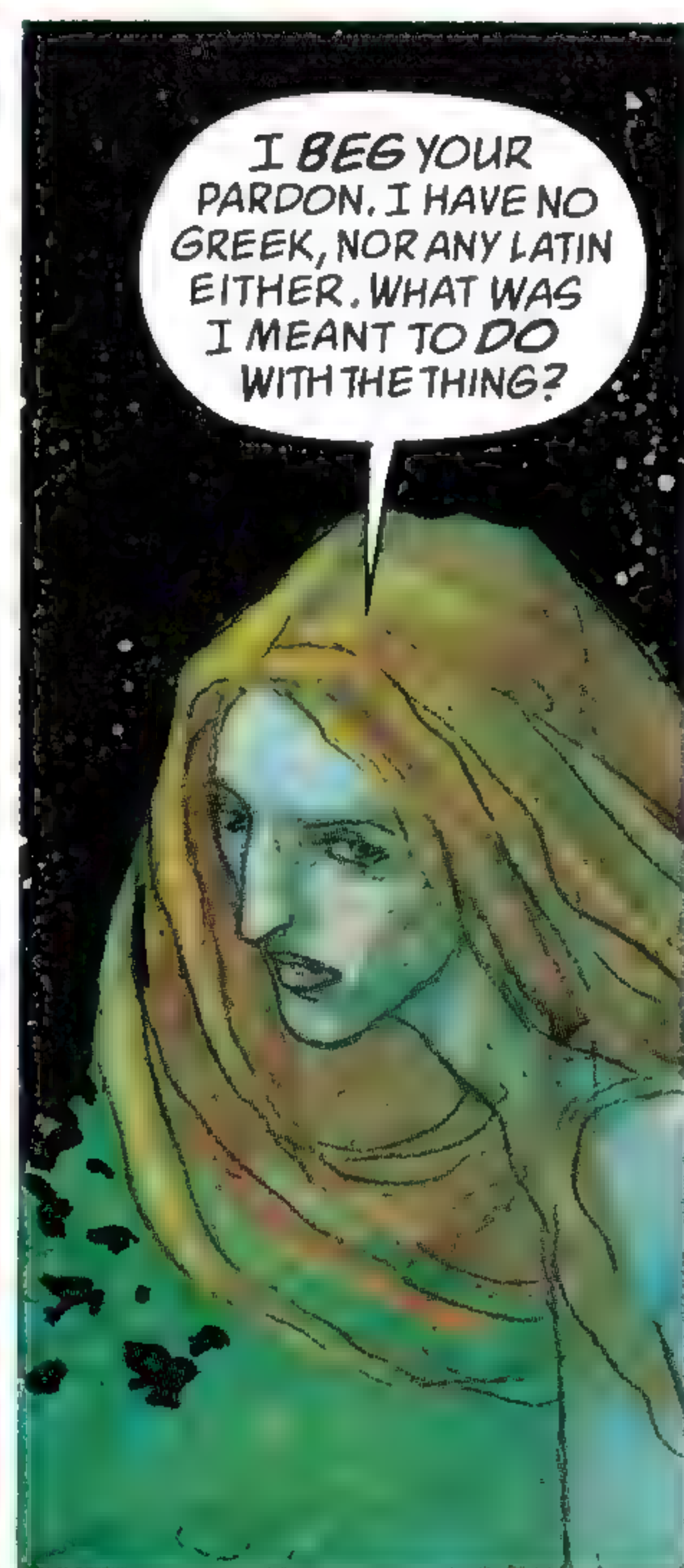
WHAT'S WRONG? I WAS ONLY...

THIS IS NO JOKE, EMMOT.

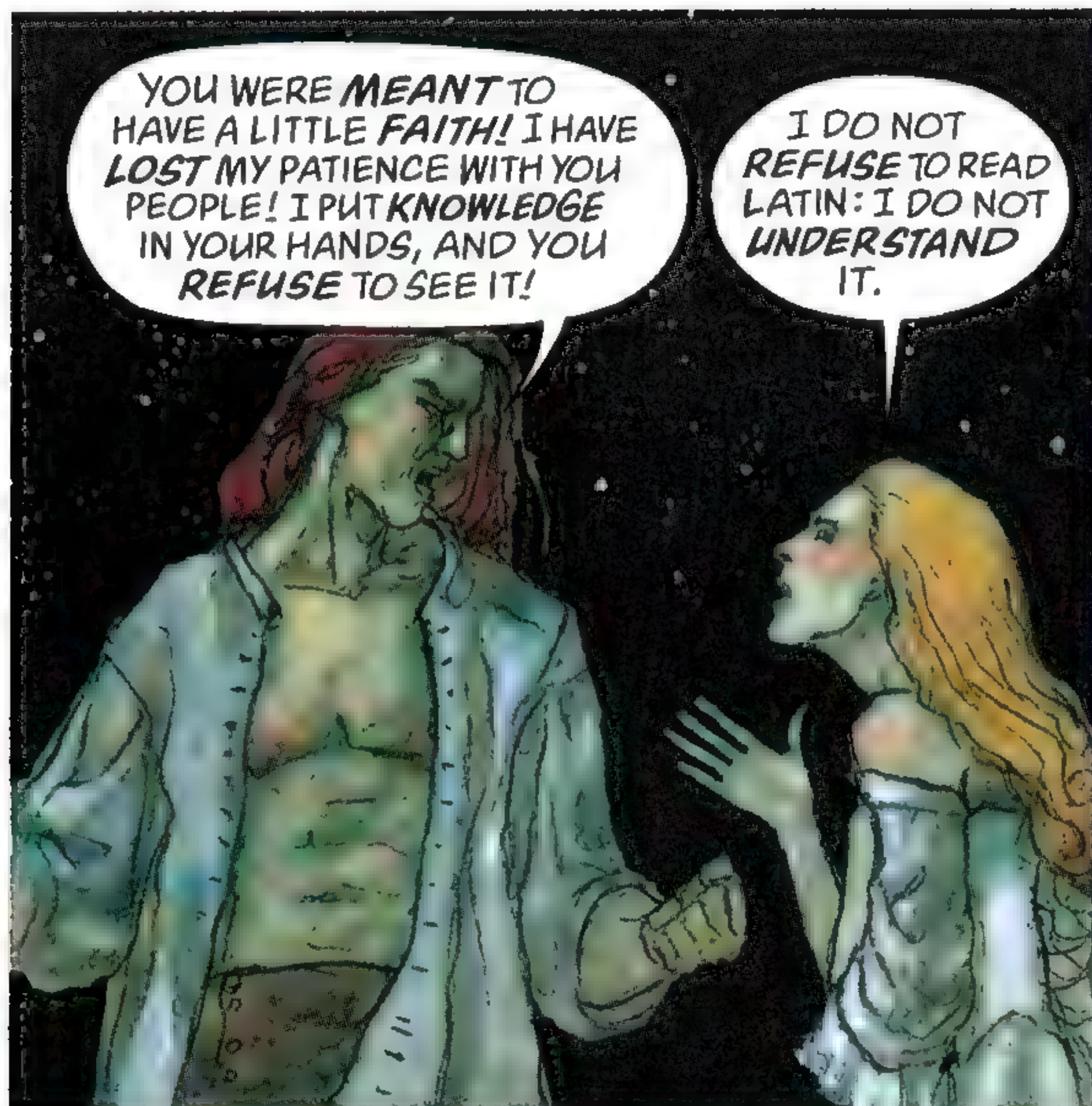


I TOLD YOU THE HERBS WOULD **PROTECT** YOU, AND NOW THEY ARE **GONE**.

I GAVE YOU THE **SCROLL**, YET YOU DISCARDED IT **UNREAD**.



I **BEG** YOUR PARDON. I HAVE NO GREEK, NOR ANY LATIN EITHER. WHAT WAS I MEANT TO **DO** WITH THE THING?

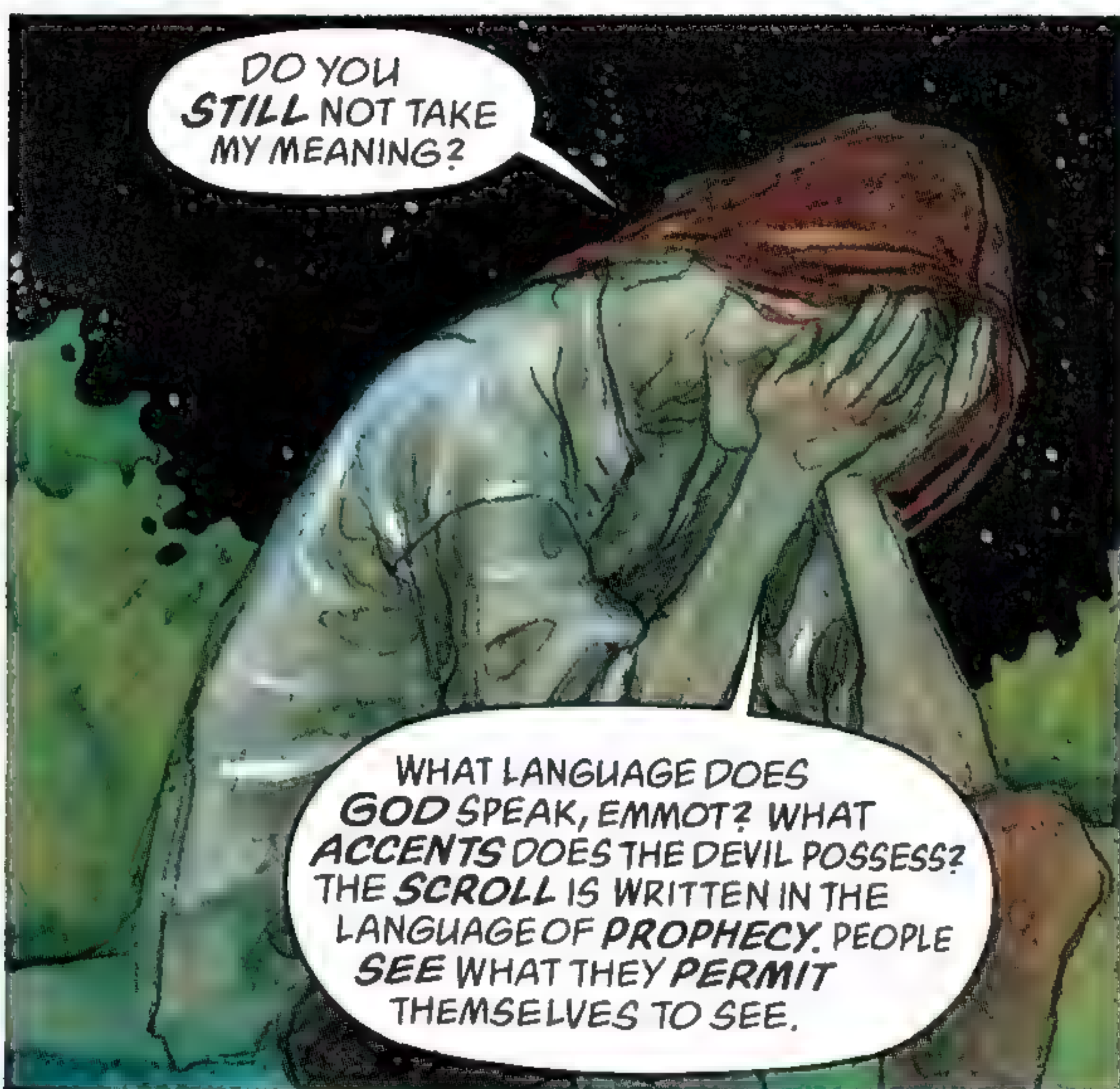


YOU WERE **MEANT** TO HAVE A LITTLE **FAITH**! I HAVE **LOST** MY PATIENCE WITH YOU PEOPLE! I PUT **KNOWLEDGE** IN YOUR HANDS, AND YOU **REFUSE** TO SEE IT!

I DO NOT **REFUSE** TO READ LATIN: I DO NOT **UNDERSTAND** IT.



YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND WHAT YOU DO NOT **WISH** TO UNDERSTAND. THE **SCROLL** COULD BE READ BY A **BLIND** CHILD--**IF** THAT CHILD HAD THE HEART FOR IT.



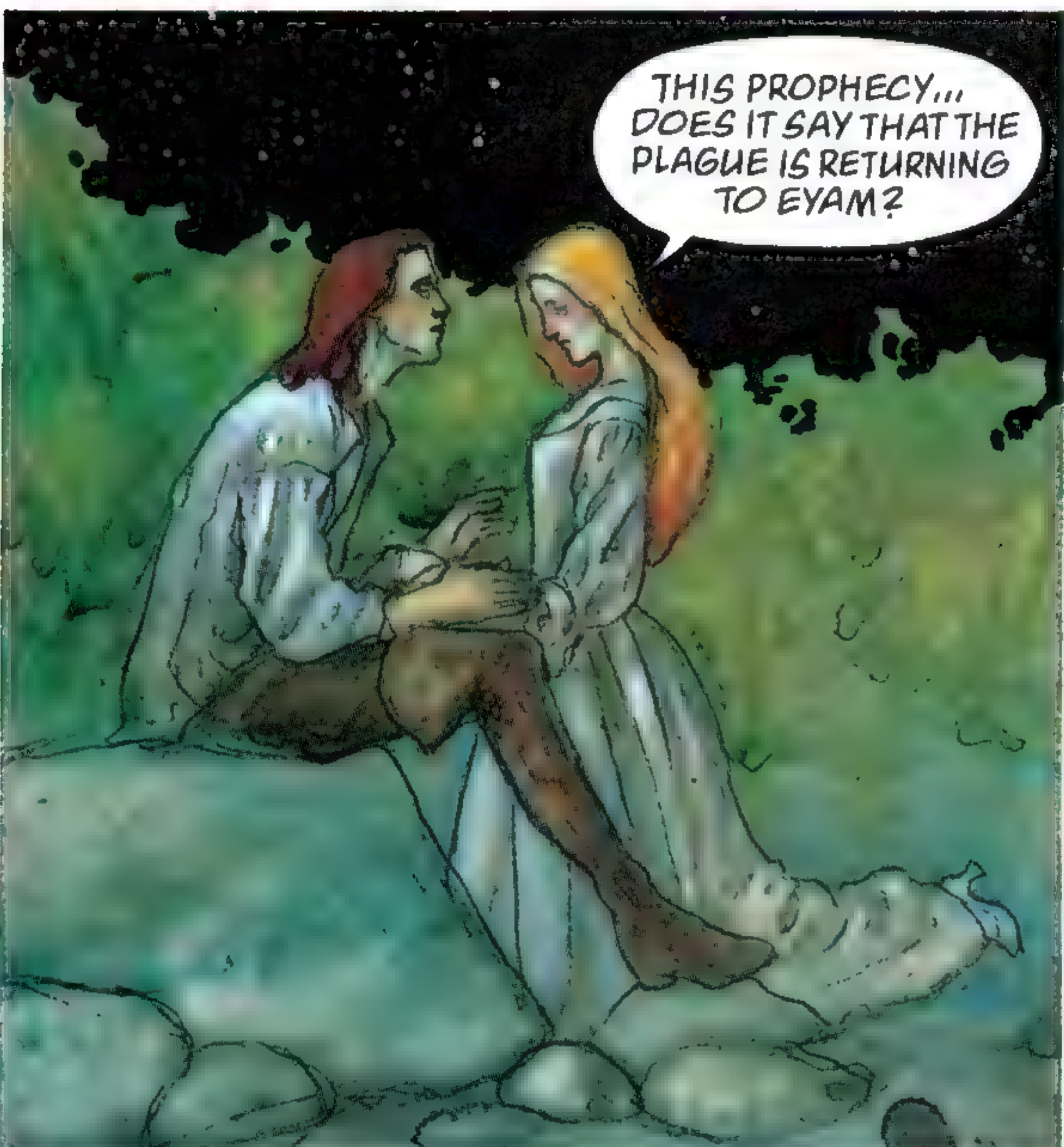
DO YOU **STILL** NOT TAKE MY MEANING?

WHAT LANGUAGE DOES **GOD** SPEAK, EMMOT? WHAT **ACCENTS** DOES THE DEVIL POSSESS? THE **SCROLL** IS WRITTEN IN THE LANGUAGE OF **PROPHECY**. PEOPLE **SEE** WHAT THEY **PERMIT** THEMSELVES TO SEE.



MOST BELIEVE IT TO BE IN THE OLD SCHOLARLY TONGUES--**OTHERS** THINK IT IS WRITTEN IN A FORM OF **HIEROGLYPHICS**.

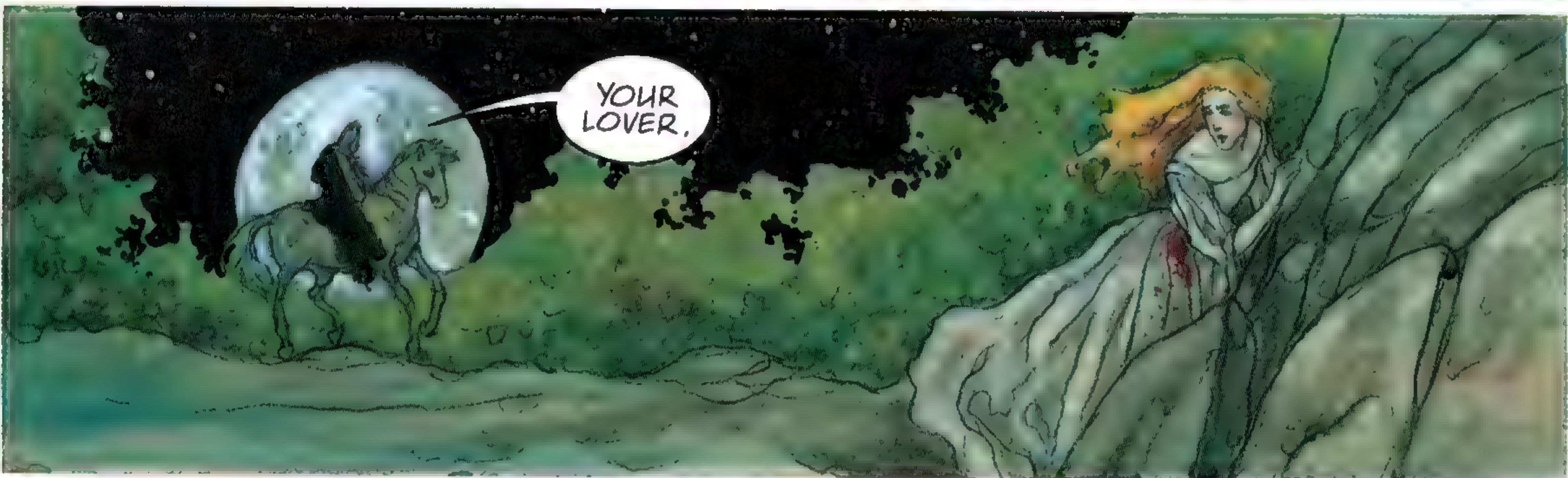
YET FOR THOSE WHO ARE **WILLING** TO **KNOW** THE WORST, THE **WORDS** ARE WRITTEN AS **CLEAR** AS DAY.



THIS **PROPHECY**... DOES IT SAY THAT THE **PLAGUE** IS RETURNING TO **EYAM**?



IN **APRIL**, EMMOT. IN THIS **UNNATURAL** SPRING WHICH YOU HAVE **SUMMONED**.





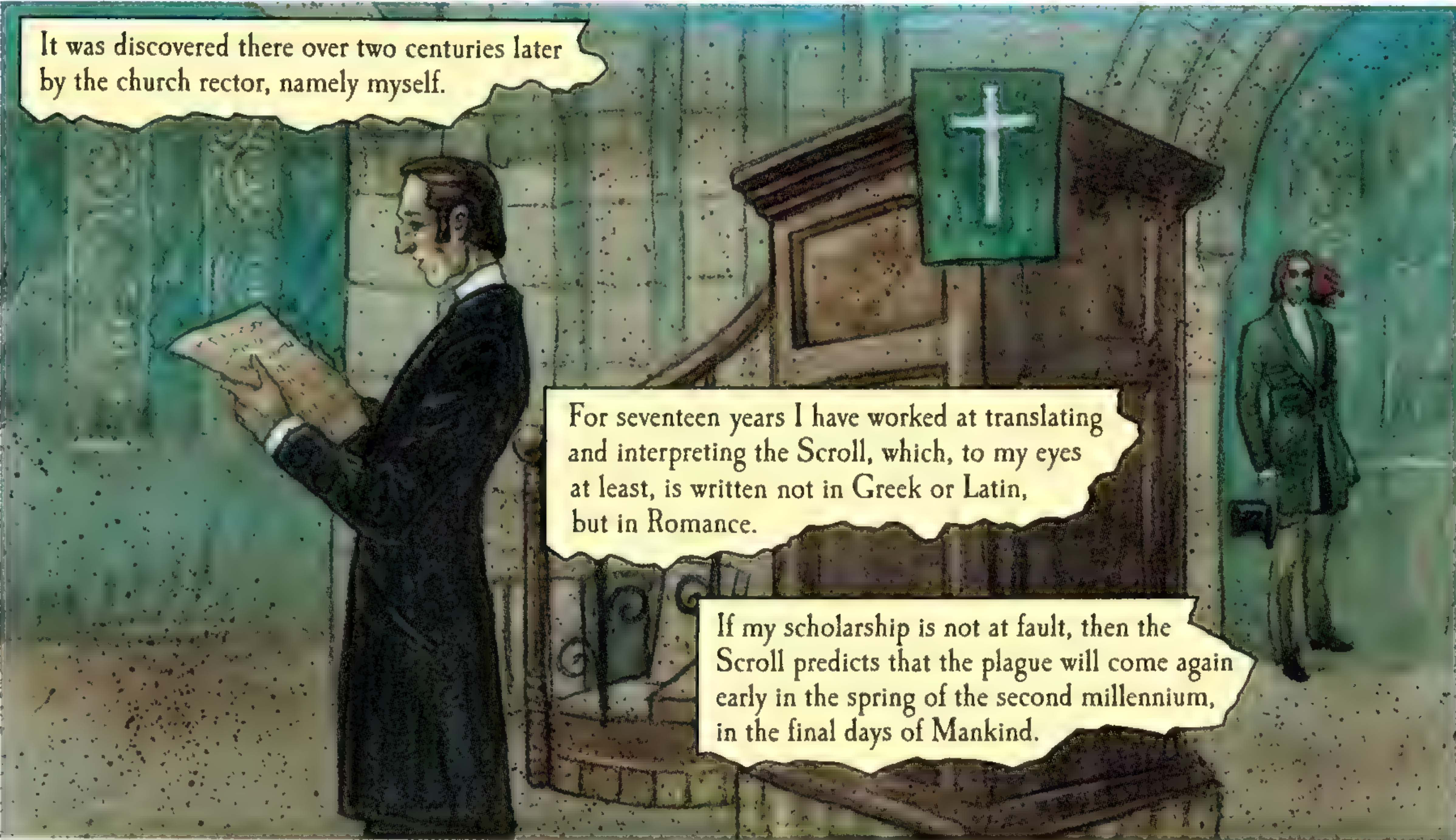
Records show that the bubonic plague returned to Eyam in April, and remained until October. By that time, *two-thirds* of the village had perished.

Emmot Siddal's body was never found. Her mother claimed she had seen her daughter walking with the ghosts of a queen and a princess in the shadow of Cucklet Delf—but her mother was known to be *mad*.



The two vicars also outlived this last, great outbreak of mankind's ancient scourge. William Mompesson left the village, but Thomas Stanley remained.

In 1670, just before his death, he *concealed* the Destiny Scroll behind a loose stone in the thirteenth-century chancel of the church.



It was discovered there over two centuries later by the church rector, namely myself.

For seventeen years I have worked at translating and interpreting the Scroll, which, to my eyes at least, is written not in Greek or Latin, but in Romance.

If my scholarship is not at fault, then the Scroll predicts that the plague will come again early in the spring of the second millennium, in the final days of Mankind.

Yet if the scroll is false, then Emmot Siddal died two hundred years ago and I have *wasted* a third of my allotted span of years on phantasms and lies.

If it is *not*, then she has found her way through the labyrinth of this life to the garden of forking paths, where the shades of past and future flit restlessly about her, knowing she carries the seed of *pestilence* within her womb.

--LORCAN CAVENDISH, EDITOR.
THE BOOK OF DESTINY, GRIMOIRE
PUBLISHERS, GREAT BRITAIN, 1899.





FROM THE JOURNAL
OF RUTH KNIGHT,
NOV. 1, 2009:

With no rooster
left to herald the
dawn, daybreak
was announced
by the leathery
flutter of
bat wings, a dry,
frantic sound
like distant
applause.

I had waited
too long to
return
Ryder's book.

But he had known this
would happen, hadn't he?

Because I hadn't believed
him, I hadn't thought
much about the coincidences
in each of Ryder's stories.
A man called John, or
John Ryder. A horse
with the Byzantine
name of
Paladin.



I'd thought it was all
done for effect, the way
old ghost stories always
used to end with "...and
that all happened in this
very room."



And then, of course, the
narrator would turn out
to be the ghost.

I still do not know how Ryder lost his horse: whether Paladin was stolen or abandoned or even sold. Perhaps Ryder was trying to renounce his role, but if so, then why did he return to reclaim it?

What I do know is this: I invited Pestilence into my house, introduced him to my neighbors.

I thought to cheat Destiny, and so was cheated.

BAM
BAM
BAM

NORMAN, THANK GOD. RYDER'S TAKEN THE HORSE, AND I CAN'T FIND EITHER OF THE CHILDREN. I DON'T KNOW IF HE'S WITH THEM, OR...

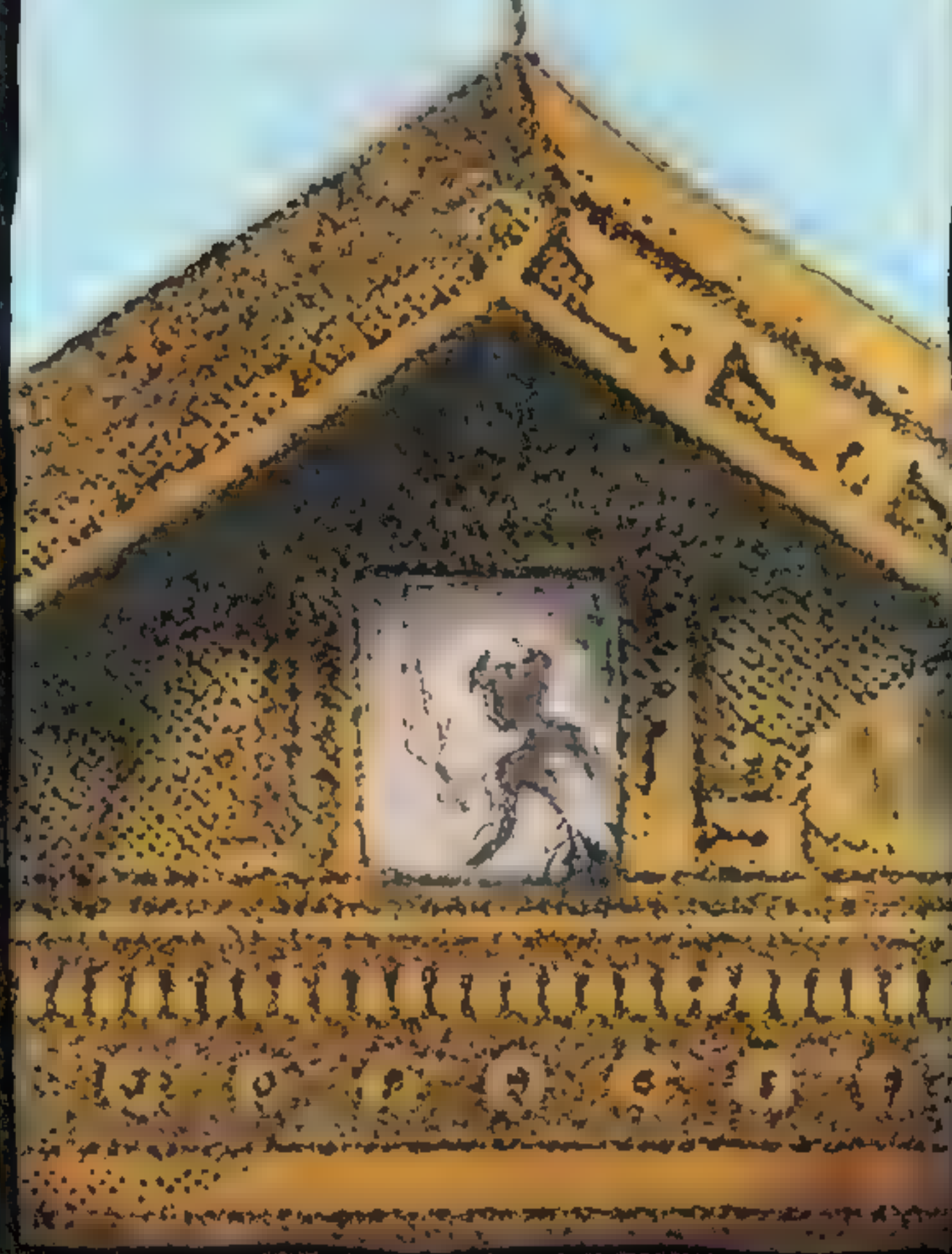
YOU'RE NOT LETTING ME IN, ARE YOU?

YOU MADE YOUR
CHOICE, RUTH. NOW
BACK OFF.

MARTIN,
THIS
ISN'T...

BACK
OFF!!

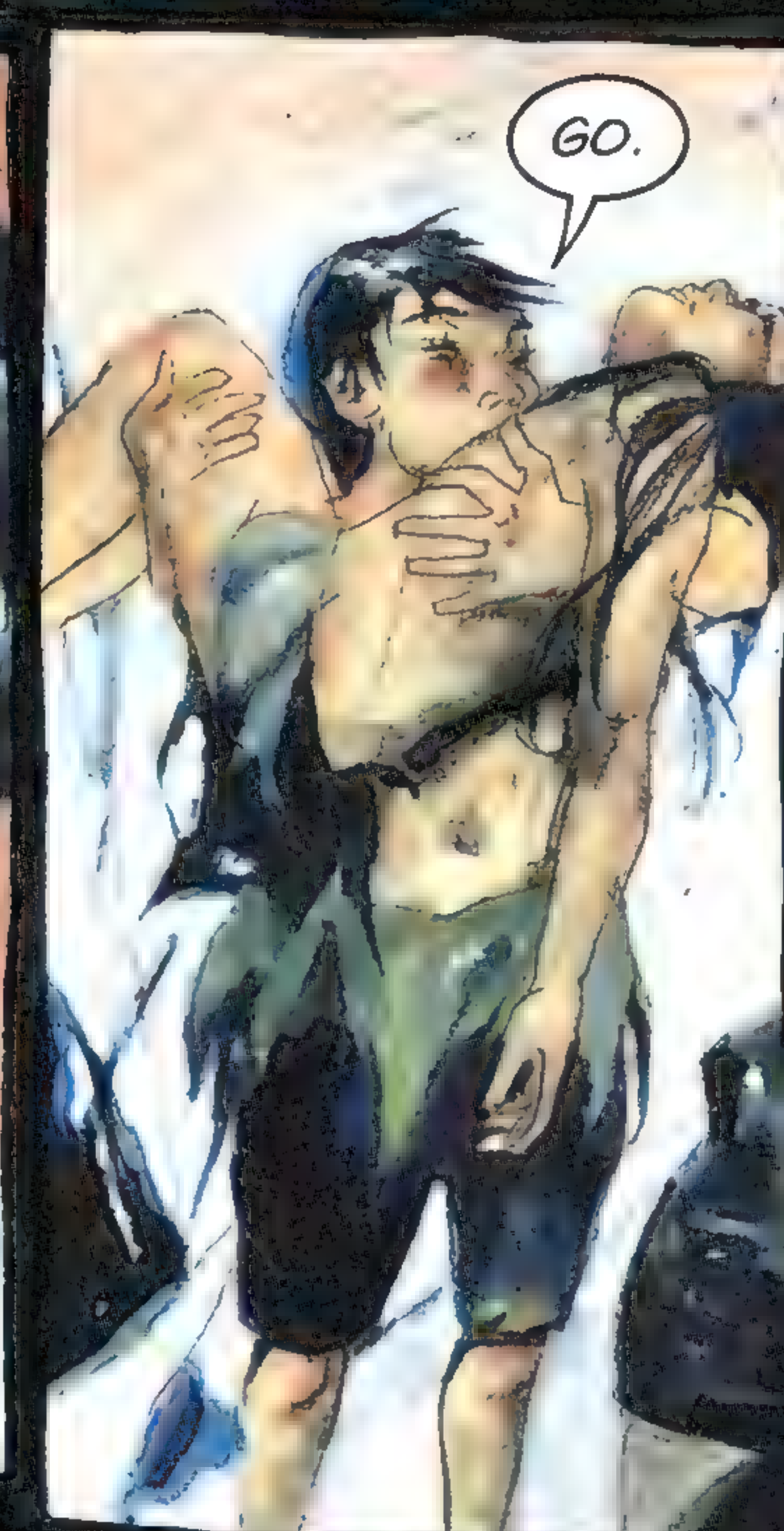
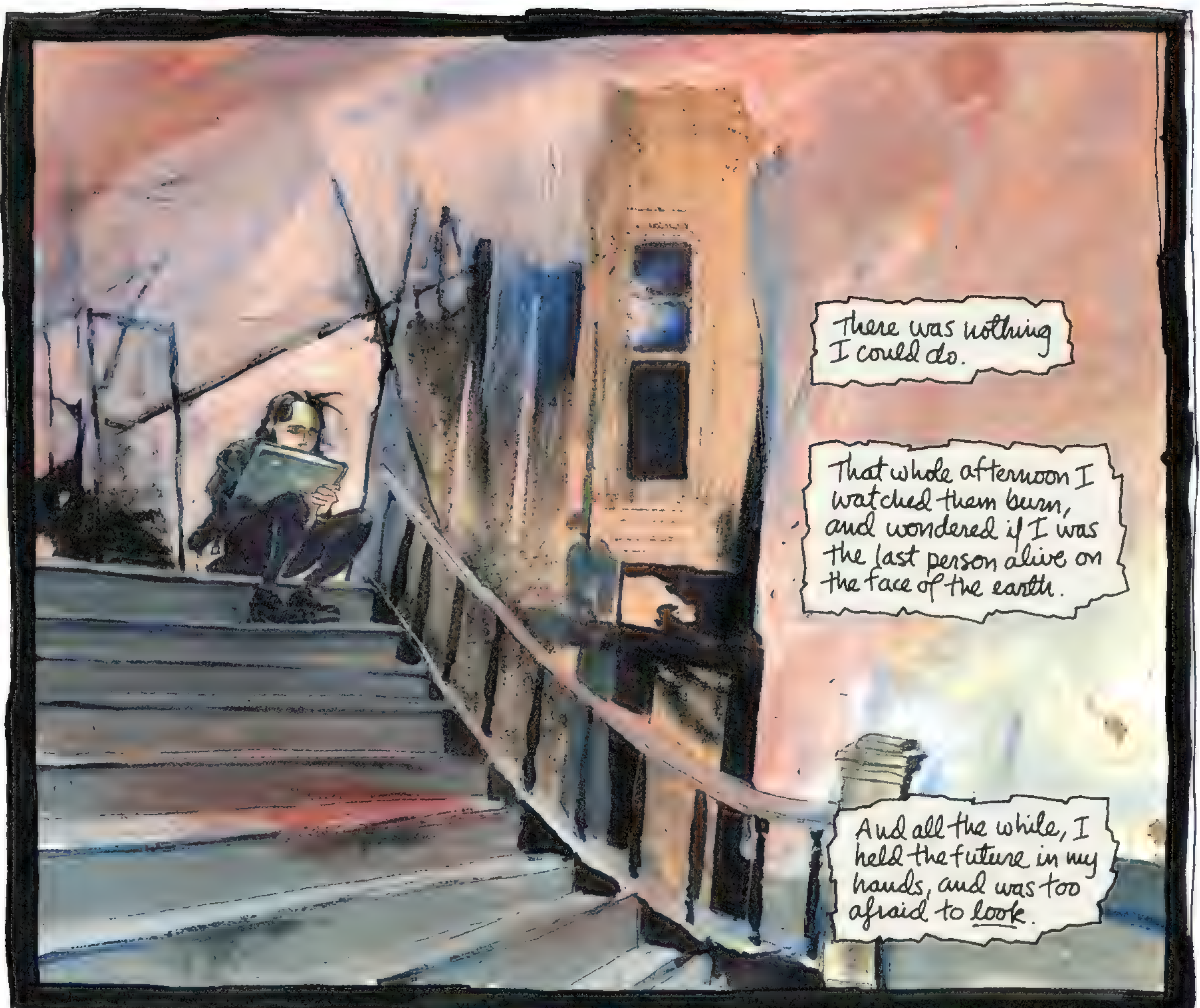
They were so frightened
of the plague, they forgot
that there are other
ways to die.



War. Famine.
Disaster.



The other
riders of the
apocalypse.

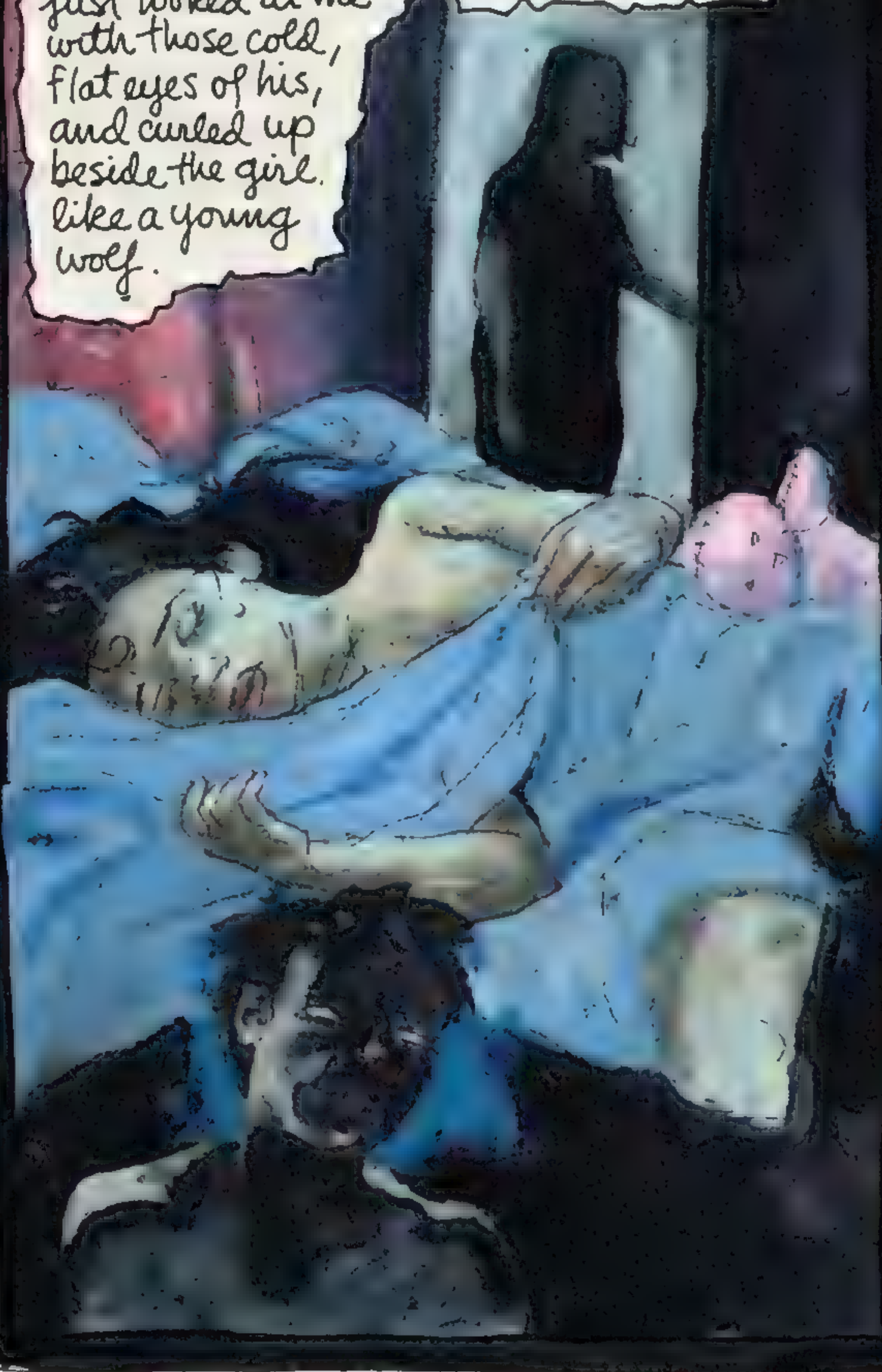




The children are sleeping now. The boy would not let me give him a bath, but he ate my food and let me bring down the girl's fever with cold cloths.

It is strange to see them both in my daughter's room. I thought at first to put the boy in the guest room, but he just looked at me with those cold, flat eyes of his, and curled up beside the girl like a young wolf.

In a way, he reminds me of Ryder: I would not be surprised to learn that Destiny has something in store for that child.



It all depends on the girl, though. If she lives, I believe they both will stay here with me. If she dies...

Ryder said the Destiny Scroll contained the answers to my questions, but all it does is tell of the four great plagues. I want to know what comes after...

I want to see the real Book of Destiny.



We all walk the labyrinth path. We all
walk blind in Destiny's shadow.

Surrender your will, and let the
labyrinth guide you.

Where the path *forks*, you may find
yourself in the abandoned byways of
the past.

Where the path is *lost*, you may wander
through the burial ground of forgotten years.

And here and there, unborn
ghosts may haunt the
borderlands between cradle
and grave.



But *all* roads lead to
Destiny's garden.

Eventually.



RUTH...MY GOD,
HOW DID YOU **FIND**
YOUR WAY HERE?

I'VE READ
THE DESTINY SCROLL,
RYDER. BUT IT DOESN'T
TELL THE WHOLE STORY.
I WANT TO KNOW IF THE
CHILDREN SURVIVE. I
NEED TO KNOW IF
ANY OF US
SURVIVE.

BUT IF YOU'VE
READ THE PAGE--
IF YOU'RE HERE NOW,
DRESSED IN WHITE,
THAT WOULD
MEAN...

DO YOU REMEMBER
READING THE BIBLE AS A
CHILD, RUTH? THERE
WERE TWO EVES IN
EDEN.

NO THERE
WEREN'T.

YES.
THERE
WERE TWO
EVES.

AND NOW I WONDER...
WHAT WOULD HAVE HAPPENED IF
ADAM HAD CHOSEN THE
OTHER ONE?



JOHN?



EMMOT.

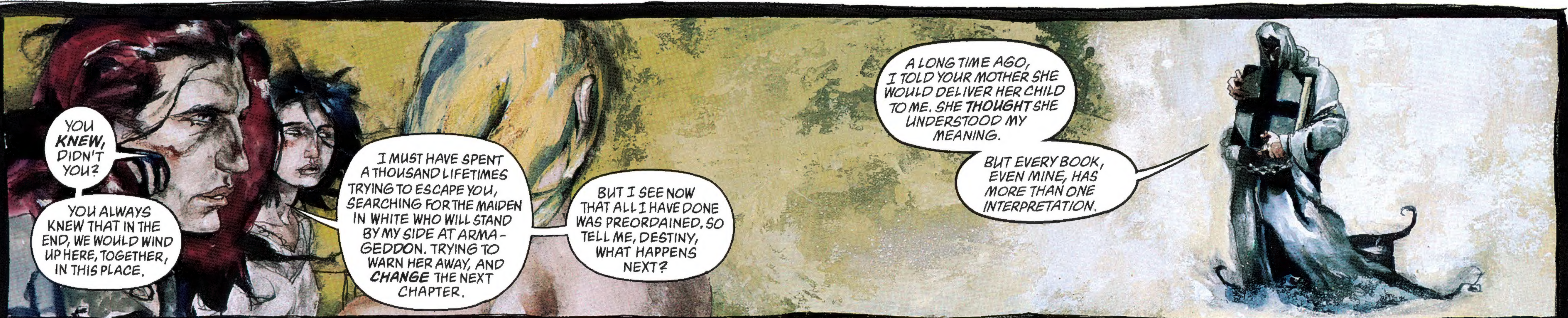
I'VE BEEN WAITING
FOR YOU. I THINK-- I
THINK IT'S BEEN FOUR
MONTHS. IT SEEMS
LONGER SOMEHOW.

I AM
CARRYING
YOUR
CHILD.

THE OLD
MONK SAID YOU
WOULD COME BACK
FOR ME, BUT I
BEGAN TO
THINK...



THAT YOU
HAD FOUND
ANOTHER.



YOU KNEW, DIDN'T YOU?

YOU ALWAYS KNEW THAT IN THE END, WE WOULD WIND UP HERE, TOGETHER, IN THIS PLACE.

I MUST HAVE SPENT A THOUSAND LIFETIMES TRYING TO ESCAPE YOU, SEARCHING FOR THE MAIDEN IN WHITE WHO WILL STAND BY MY SIDE AT ARMAGEDDON. TRYING TO WARN HER AWAY, AND CHANGE THE NEXT CHAPTER.

BUT I SEE NOW THAT ALL I HAVE DONE WAS PREORDAINED, SO TELL ME, DESTINY, WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

A LONG TIME AGO, I TOLD YOUR MOTHER SHE WOULD DELIVER HER CHILD TO ME. SHE THOUGHT SHE UNDERSTOOD MY MEANING.

BUT EVERY BOOK, EVEN MINE, HAS MORE THAN ONE INTERPRETATION.



YOU CHOOSE EMMOT.

YOU CHOOSE RUTH.



SO YOU CHOOSE ME?

IF DESTINY'S SERVANT CAN BE SAID TO CHOOSE, THEN YES, EMMOT. I CHOOSE YOU.

I HAVE TOUCHED UNTOLD MILLIONS WITH DEATH, BUT YOU DARED TO TOUCH ME WITH LIFE, EMMOT. YOU HOLD MY LIFE WITHIN YOU.

IT IS YOU WHO HAVE CHOSEN ME.

THIS ISN'T REAL. THIS PLACE-- WHEN I OPEN MY EYES, REALLY OPEN MY EYES, ALL OF YOU WILL BE GONE, WON'T YOU?

THIS PLACE IS REAL FOR ME, RUTH. AND FOR EMMOT.

BUT YOU-- YOU MUST GO BACK TO YOUR LIFE NOW, AND LEARN YOUR FATE AS EACH DAY BRINGS IT.

I DON'T WANT TO GO BACK YET. I WANT TO UNDERSTAND. WAS THIS ALL A GAME TO YOU? WHY COME TO ME FOR PALADIN, WHEN HE WAS YOURS ALL ALONG?

BECAUSE HE RAN AWAY THIS TIME. I THINK HE WANTED TO TAKE A DIFFERENT ROUTE. ONE THAT DIDN'T LEAD TO THIS.

BUT PESTILENCE REMAINED MY COMPANION, SO I SEARCHED FOR PALADIN UNTIL I FOUND HIM AT YOUR HOME.



ALL ROADS LEAD TO DESTINY'S GARDEN. EVENTUALLY.



In the late seventeenth century, a young survivor of the Great Plague discovers that the pestilence which has ravaged her village is not yet over: it is simply biding its time. In the early twenty-first century, another young woman holds a prophetic book in her hands, and realizes that the bubonic plague may be coming back to claim the few remaining survivors in her own town.

Both women face a choice between dangerous innocence and deadly knowledge, for both women are linked through the ages by their attraction to one man—and by Destiny.

SUGGESTED FOR
MATURE READERS

SON OF ULTRON

"THIS FAN...
THIS MONSTER!"

